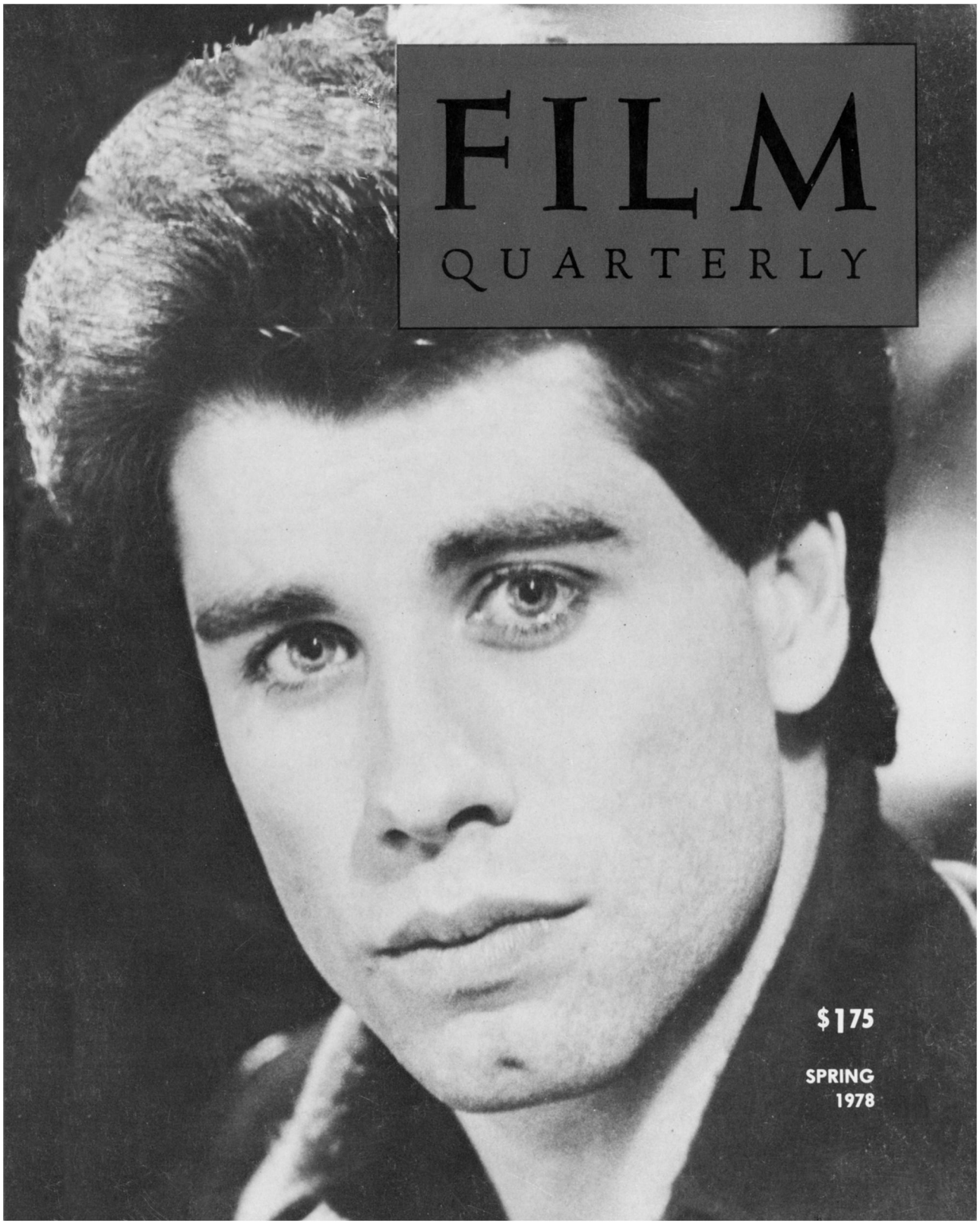
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INTERNATIONAL FILM GUIDE 1978

EDITED BY PETER COWIE

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PERIODICALS

On Film ($6.00 per year from Film Studies Dept., Univ. of California, Santa Barbara 93106) is another local journal reaching out to a national audience; its issue No. 7 contains articles on the structuration of space and materials on Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx.*

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ROSS CARE is a film historian who lives in Lancaster, Pa.; he is also a musician with independent film scores and animated cartoons among his credits, and he recently did the music for a documentary on Otto Messmer and Felix the Cat. ALBERT JOHNSON teaches at the Univ. of Calif., Berkeley. WILLIAM JOHNSON's forthcoming book of walks in the New York area will be the most fitness-producing work of "concept art" yet conceived. MARSHA KINDER is the editor of the forthcoming new *Dream Journal.* WILLIAM MORITZ is an active experimental film-maker who has taught at Calif. Institute of the Arts, Occidental College, UCLA, etc.; he has worked in the exhibition and distribution of

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he gives most women what they want, he appreciates their uniqueness, he retains his own freedom while granting them theirs, he acknowledges their equality, and he eliminates the power struggle from romance. Naturally, this evaluation is not based solely on an objective reading, but on a brief affair which she initiates with the author. While Bertrand is only narcissistically interested in telling his own story, Geneviève enlarges its frame of reference and interprets it as an illuminating commentary on contemporary relationships or a modern grammar of the new rules governing sexual games. She rejects traditional psychological explanations, except for the current cliché so popular among EST graduates and so frequently used to justify narcissism: "You have to love yourself in order to love someone else." She persuades him not to revise his manuscript and even changes the title from *The Skirt Chaser* (his crass choice) to the more positive *The Man Who Loved Women* (which Truffaut obviously prefers). When Bertrand questions the use of the past tense (love*d*), she claims it sounds better and is more consistent with his memoir style (and with Truffaut's flashback structure); yet it really helps to justify the funeral frame (a convention that was previously used romantically in *The Barefoot Contessa,* claustrophobically in Bresson's *Une Femme Douce,* and preposterously in Ken Russell's *Valentino*) and her role as narrator, which forces Bertrand to share the control with her. Hence her interpretation becomes valid because she actually transforms the work by her own initiative. Thus, unlike the poor male sociologist who collaborates with Camilla Bliss on her memoirs in *Gorgeous Kid,* Hélène is not a passive victim but an active "accomplice." One can't help wondering what connection she bears with Susan Schiffman, Truffaut's longtime collaborator, who on this film was his assistant and who (along with Truffaut and Michel Fermaud) is credited with the screenplay, and who also had a role in Truffaut's previous autobiographical film, *Day for Night.*

Of course, neither *The Man Who Loved Women* nor *Day for Night* is as blatantly autobiographical as Fellini's *8 1/2.* It's as if Truffaut separated the two main themes which Fellini intertwines—the creative process of a middle-aged artist *(Day for Night)* and his obsessive pursuit of women *(The Man Who Loved Women)*—and which Fellini was to recombine in *Casanova* (although there the autobiographical dimension is even more subdued). Nevertheless, Bertrand bears striking similarities with Fellini's Guido. Another skirt-chaser befuddled by contradictions, Guido is also unable to pass up any woman, yet yearns for romantic love with an ideal goddess; he's a comic sadist who fantasizes about a harem where he can crack a whip to the strains of Wagner, yet retains the infantile, narcissistic wish to be wrapped in a warm towel by a loving mother to the soothing tones of a lullaby. Both men want to turn their contradictory instincts and adventures into an autobiographical work of art. Yet whereas Guido ends up reaffirming the values of spontaneity and extravagance, Bertrand clings desperately to his rigid game plan right to the end. Unlike Fellini, Truffaut does not really seriously explore the creative process in this film. Perhaps *The Man Who Loved Women* plus *Day for Night* add up to *8 1/2.* Perhaps not.

—MARSHA KINDER

NOTES

1. "Both films present an encounter between two people possessing entirely different bodies of knowledge—the civilized and the wild. *The Wild Child* focuses on what the nature boy has to sacrifice in order to acquire the benefits of civilization, thereby stressing the values of both worlds (and developing a tragic vision, since both choices involve loss). But the darkly comic *Gorgeous Kid* emphasizes the inadequacies of both worlds; the professor's civilized naiveté does not protect him from Camilla the predator." ("Truffaut's Gorgeous Killers," *Film Quarterly,* Winter 73-74, p. 6)
2. The chart that follows is not found in Deleuze's book, but is based on selections from and elaborations of his theoretical construct.

CONTRIBUTORS, cont'd.

independent films for many years, is also a poet, and possesses a Ph.D. in ancient Breton lays. BILL NICHOLS is head of the film program at Queen's University, Kingston, Ont., and editor of *Movies and Methods.* DON WILLIS has published on Renoir and Buñuel in *Sight & Sound,* and is working on a long Ozu article. DAN YAKIR has written for *The Village Voice, Sight & Sound, The Soho Weekly News,* and is writing a book about French cinema.

Ciné-transe: The Vision of Jean Rouch

DAN YAKIR

AN INTERVIEW

Jean Rouch is himself a paradox of the cinema. Though French, he has lived in Africa much of his life and made many films there. Known as an ethnographic documentarist whose films sometimes provided glimpses of human life too terrible to bear, he made* Chronique d'un Eté *in Paris, with sociologist Edgar Morin, in 1961; its elegant interpenetration of documentary and narrative cinema gave a new formal and political sophistication to* cinéma-vérité. *Whether harrowing or funny (which they also sometimes are) Rouch's films turn out to be profoundly poetic and personal. He is an important figure among those artists who work with the materials of direct reality.

In what state is African cinema today?

It exists and it goes in all directions, which is normal for a young, turbulent cinema. What upsets me is the sad direction of the *cinéma d' information*: the official political militancy. Ousmane Sembene is someone who has left this militant path and I think it's good. His last film, *Ceddo*, which he made after *Xala*, is against Islamic imperialism in Africa. I think it's very courageous. The film was shown at the Moscow Film Festival a month and a half ago and didn't win any prize at the demand of the Arab countries which claimed that the film was prejudiced against Islam. The Soviets, who are a bit stupid, didn't give it a prize. As if Islam had nothing to do with religion, that opium of the masses. . . . It's good because we get out of a ridiculous situation in which Islam is considered a progressive religion simply because it's the religion of immigrant workers in Europe.

On the other hand, in Niger where I work, there is a man like Moustapha Alassane, who has also departed from the norm and is taking a sabbatical at Columbia University. It is also a sign that something new is about to arrive. He needs a certain distance vis-à-vis Africa to make a new cinema. He has reinvented cinema all alone, starting with making his own camera from an old 16mm projector. Then he worked for the National Film Board in Montreal and learnt animation from Norman McLaren. He then returned to Niger to direct completely independent films. His is a formidable voice. He follows a path which seems to me essential.

The third example that I can give you is another film-maker from Niger: Inousa Husseini. He wants to make a film on French ethnology. He studied at Tours, in the Val-de-Loire, and prepared a project on the sexual life of the local people. His project couldn't be realized but it's his dream. It's ethnography in reverse.

There, you have three very different directions in African cinema. Of course, I am not speaking about the official cinema, the great danger of which is the bureaucracy. I have just returned from Mozambique where I went at the invitation of the Film Institute to present a few films and work with some local directors. I think my visit shook them up a bit, as I urged them not to make films about party congresses—to get out of official cinema. Together, we made a little film which is a kind of follow-up to *Come Back Africa* by Lionel

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Rogosin: on the workers of Mozambique who return to their country in song and dance. I think I showed that creativity is everywhere and one could make films like this, that one should continually fight against conformism, against accepted ideas, and that it's necessary to stir people up. If I play a little role in African cinema, this is it. Even if my films are censored and criticized . . .

Does it happen often?

Very often. My first feature film, *Moi, Un Noir,* was censored by the government of the Ivory Coast for showing a person who lives in the street, a tramp rather than a lawyer or a doctor—a bourgeois. The French government also tried to get the film banned in Africa because the black hero fights with a white man. After all, one shouldn't show things like that . . .

My second film, *La Pyramide Humaine,* dealt with the problem of racism in a high school between black and white students. Again, a problem which is better left unmentioned. It's better not to speak about racism even if it exists . . . The film was censored in all African countries.

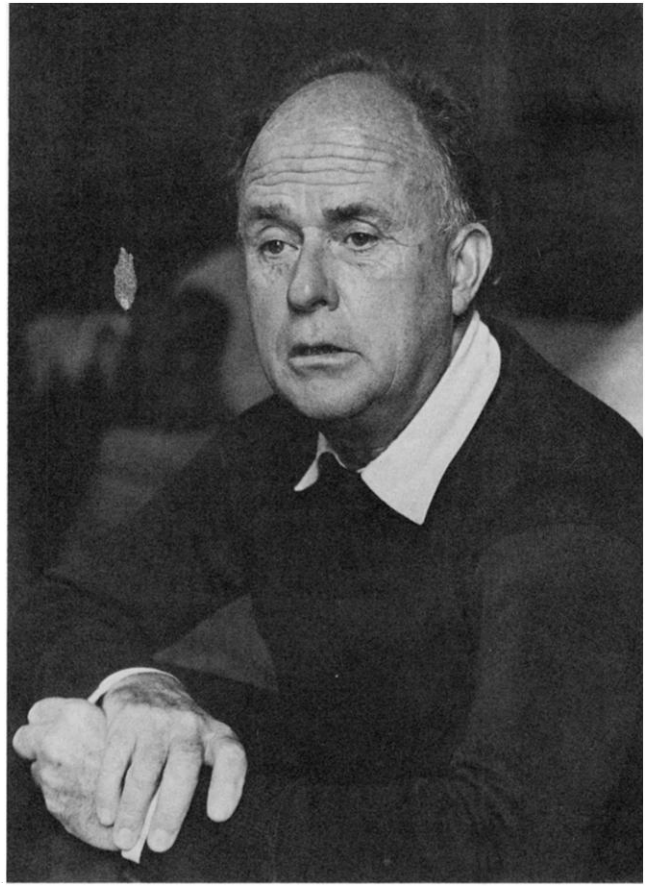
Les Maitres Fous was controversial everywhere. It was criticized by the British and by young African intellectuals. The late Senegalese director Blaise Senghor told me that when he came out of the theater in Paris, the spectators looked at him, saying to each other: "Here's another one who is going to eat a dog!" It took them a long time to understand the real meaning of the film.

I think it's necessary to fight against censorship, even that of friends. For example, *Cocorico! Monsieur Poulet,* although uncensored, was considered scandalous: it is scandalous to tell a funny story when there is a drought in Niger. But the film was shot in a region where, by chance, they never had a better crop. I think that it's very interesting to show that in the middle of a natural disaster there's also success.

I made these films because I thought it was necessary. I was very lucky to make films which had no great commercial success. One cannot accuse me of carrying on a "slave trade" by filming in Africa.

Do you think political considerations are less valid than social ones?

No, I think the two are important but one must have imagination. Sociology for sociology's sake



Jean Rouch (Photo: Sonia Moskowitz)

makes terrible screen material, which prevents you from *seeing* problems since you *study* them. So, you have a conscience, you make a report, etc., but you don't apply it; you're not really concerned. Sometimes political ideology itself is improper, no matter what your position is: you are "right" and being "right" is a mistake because problems do not present themselves like this. One is never "right" or "wrong." It is ineffectual to continuously assert your own opinions. It's a refuge. I think these are the two great obstacles to the development of cinema in the world.

Militant cinema, which is widespread in the US, Canada, and France, is always intended for people who are already convinced, so it's useless. The best political film is Michel Brault's *Les Ordres* because it's directed at cops, that is: the enemy. It is they who should be convinced. I

Rouch's most recent film, COCORICO! M. POULET

think this is the reason why there is not one real film on May 1968.

And before?

Before, yes. *La Chinoise* by Godard was the film that announced it but Godard was incapable of making a film in '68. I too was incapable, maybe because I was doing other things. Film was in the street and it was not worth making. One had to *live* it. There is not one good book on '68. Cohn-Bendit's book isn't valid. The only valid book is by the chief of the Paris police who tells everything that took place. He was confused by May '68. He was completely in agreement with Cohn-Bendit and the others. This is wonderful, but it's sad it's the only one. All the people who participated—sociologists like Touraine, Edgar Morin—were incapable of saying anything about it.

Even now, after taking a certain distance?

I think we can expect fiction films. *October* was shot ten years after the Soviet Revolution. *Potemkin* and *October* were not at all the way it really happened. I think it'll come with distance. Eye-witness stuff is awful, like the young girl who was taped on video in '68 and who now sees it, ten years later, when she's a good petite bourgeoise . . . And films like Kramer's *Ice* or *Punishment Park* are bad. This is not how it is.

In France today do you see any cinema of value?

Yes. I participate in the jury that gives the Prix Georges Sadoul every year to a first feature film, both French and foreign. For the last four years, we've been giving it to French films that were, in a sense, bad, while there were fantastic foreign films. Last year, we gave it to *Trobriand Cricket* by Gary Kildea and Jerry Leach. It's a wonderful film, perhaps one of the greatest anthropological films of recent time. It shows the way the Papuans adopted cricket, a colonial game, while deciding to change everything: I don't know how many people there are in a cricket team, but they decided to replace the leather ball with a wooden one, so that if you get hit, it'll injure you. From the moment there is risk, it becomes important. They decided that flannel pants weren't very practical for the game, so they retrieved their old war uniforms that were used to celebrate sexual symbols: the lingam, etc. The film is subtitled "An Ingenuous Response to Colonialism."

This year we have a good vintage and I hope we'll give the prize to an extraordinary film-mak-

er, who is a photographer for the GAMMA agency: Raymond Depardon. He became quite well known in France after making a film on Madame Claustre who was a prisoner in Tibesti (northern Chad) for two years. He made two fantastic films: one on President Giscard-d'Estaing's primary, which is the portrait of a president, shot in direct cinema style, like Leacock, and a new film on the birth of a leftist paper called *Le Matin de Paris*—on the three days that preceded the first issue. It's a pitiless film on the press. It was so cruel that now he wants to make a film about a photographer of a press agency, to show that he can be as cruel toward himself as toward the others.

Someone like Rivette?

Of course. I liked *Duelle* a lot, it's fantastic. And he keeps going . . . Truffaut is a very strange case: he follows the road, there are ups and downs, but he has charm. And the great master Luis Buñuel who, even more than Margaret Mead, is always so young. This is extraordinary.

And Godard's video films?

I find them very interesting but I think he has to go further. This is the only problem with Godard, who is maybe the most fantastic personality in world cinema. He was at the peak of international success and decided to leave everything to make experimental cinema. Unfortunately, his health is very precarious, which is why he can't do all he wants. For example, five months ago he went to Mozambique. He stayed fifteen days in a hotel and could do nothing. He was so weary that they offered to reimburse his air fare. This is not his fault. But I also think he made a mistake going to Grenoble because it's a return to the source, near Switzerland, and a Swiss like him must be completely de-nationalized and go to Paris. But he goes on and the *films de communication* he made are wonderful.

Why did you choose to make films in Africa?

It's not by chance. During the war I was arrested by the Germans and the only way to leave France was to find a job outside of the occupied zone. Since I was a civil engineer, I found work in Africa and was sent to Niger, in 1941. A year later, I was expelled by the Petainist governor as a Gaullist and sent to Dakar. Luckily, at that time the Americans entered North Africa. You see, I am a Catalan and when we are forbidden to do something, the only way for us is just to go ahead and do it. After the war, there was the same governor in Niger but with a different uniform . . .

Before leaving school, I studied anthropology, so I shot my films there. I also know the people there: Damouré with whom I shot *Cocorico! Monsieur Poulet* and who did the sound for *Les Maitres Fous*—I've known him since 1942. Thirty-five years of friendship are irreplaceable. We are accomplices and we can do anything.

You returned to Paris in the sixties to make Chronique d'un Été *and* Paris Vu Par. *Why? Is it a different period?*

No, it's because Edgar Morin offered me the chance to make a film on Paris. He said I shouldn't shoot only in Africa and should try to see what was going on in my own country, which I hardly know at all. I spent most of my time in Africa and when I was in France, it was to write my PhD. or produce my first film, so I didn't know France at all. It interested me. It is very hard to make a film among one's own group. But I'd like to do it again now.

It's a fiction film that I plan to direct on Jean-Pierre Boviala, a friend of Godard, who has built the best 16mm camera in the world. He wants to invent a tiny video camera that can be hand-held, to enable one to look with the hand. I'll film him, introducing fiction into his life—he's very unhappy. Koudelsky, who invented the Nagra, was a wonderful man who travelled and was happy. After making the Nagra, which is the best tape-recorder in the world, he became a businessman and as unhappy as they all are.

Marceline in CHRONIQUE D'UN ETE

Boviala's problem is that if he succeeds, there'll be no more Sony or General Electric—only his. He'll be the most important executive in the world but he'll also be finished as Jean-Pierre Boviala, and he doesn't want it. Since it's an enormous problem for him, I offered to give him a role in a film I plan to direct this year, based on an idea by Hugh Gray who teaches film and classics in Los Angeles. He's a friend of Robert Flaherty and I met him, just like I met Michel Brault, in a Flaherty seminar given in California in 1957. It's a beautiful story about the cult of Dionysus: about the need for a nature cult in industrial society. Boviala will be a Dionysus who has returned to earth to write a thesis at the Sorbonne with a group of young thinkers who are a bit crazy, like Foucault, Althusser . . . He gets a job in an electronics factory, makes that camera, and faces the dilemma. Finally, the camera devours him—in fact, we don't know the end because maybe the camera won't work . . . We'll really shoot while he works on the camera, which will enable us to turn toward the imaginary.

The great problem I have is with music and dance. I found a crazy guy who studied music in India and discovered that the music system there can be learnt much more easily than Western classical music. He set up an atelier in St. Nazaire, which is a port where they build boats with Portuguese, North African and French workers. He taught them Indian music and they discovered they could use dockyard materials to make music: a kind of sitar with a metal plate that has a fantastic resonance. It fits well with the theme of industrial society—someone who plays the role of Orpheus. Now we need a dancer, which is a great difficulty. In Africa, it's enough to play music and the Africans will dance beautifully, no matter what. If we turn to dancers like Bejart, it'll be pretentious and bad. Maybe we'll use some American troupe in Paris.

It seems to me you are increasingly interested in making fiction films.

Not really. Fiction films are my vacations. I make one fiction film for five or six documentaries. For me, documentary and fiction are similar. For example, I plan to make a ciné-portrait of Margaret Mead. For me, she is what we call in anthropology a "totemic ancestor," so we're already in the imaginary. I know that with the camera, when we have a dialogue, it'll be a fiction film on the world, the US, what we think, our dreams, etc. I'll provoke her with the camera, interview her and be the cameraman all at once. And we'll shoot for 10 minutes or so until we're tired. We won't know in advance what will be the end. The conclusion will come somehow.

And a film like Babatu?

It's historical fiction, a very ambitious film because it's fiction on history. It's a very subjective film in which the story is told in two different ways that are both false. The truth will never be told, especially when it's a story of a war. And in history, it's always war stories that one tells and nobody can really tell them. They always tell lies. In the film, one of the heroes is forced to tell his son that it's necessary to go to war, even though he knows it's terrible. I think it's difficult to make such a film. It was very controversial in Africa because it shows that African wars were ridiculous. In fact, when I shot it I thought a lot about Godard's *Les Carabiniers.* I have had the unfortunate privilege of participating in war and I know what it is. In 1945 it was necessary, but one always says it's necessary. So, to say that the African wars of the last century were ridiculous is prejudiced against African culture—it's strange that one should think so. That people will be proud of their wars! . . .

A Bridge Too Far is a film that completely destroys a character who has been seen as a god by the whole world—Montgomery—who was really an imbecile. I'm sure of that or he'd never be a general . . . So, it's possible to do it in our civilization, but how can one say that an African warrior was an imbecile? It insults Africa . . . So, I think it's necessary to say it. For Babatu and the others, force was the important thing. The film shows what could happen in such a war of slavery in which there were no dead. We show the war as a sort of sport tournament, as words and insults rather than action. The epic account that people make, the oral tradition—the minstrels—is completely false. They say they killed 1,000 people while in the film there's only one or two dead. The second story, which is true, is never told to anyone, just mentioned among themselves.

Rivette told me it was the only interesting film he saw last year.

In Cannes. Yes, he received it quite warmly.

BABATU

What relationship do you see between the objective and the subjective in cinéma vérité?

It's the same as in the humanistic sciences. When you observe people, you're automatically present and there's nothing you can do about it; so there's a distortion of truth. The humanistic sciences are terribly subjective. Even when you use a computer, the way the question is posed influences the answer. The way of shooting influences whatever you're filming. This may be the reason why I work with a very small team and why I want to be my own cameraman: to be subjectively responsible for what I shoot.

My rule of shooting is simple. When students ask me what should the length of a sequence be, I answer: "Press the button and when you get bored stop. That's all." When I get bored, I start using zooms, etc., which I know I'll cut later on.

That is, you try to be objective but, like everybody else . . .

One cannot be . . . I'm completely against what Vertov—whom I admire very much otherwise—said about unexpected cinema. I think that to hide a camera is disgusting and dishonest. I increasingly use what I call a *camera de contact:* a close focal point and a wide-angle lens, to be close to people. The new Zeiss Optagon lenses are fantastic: in 16mm you can get a very wide angle which allows you extreme closeness and the camera makes no sound. At that moment, the camera becomes a third character: a combination of Flaherty's "participant camera" and Vertov's theory. You can make a synthesis there. The objectivity of the lens is in being an additional tool, an incredible stimulant for the observed as well as the observer.

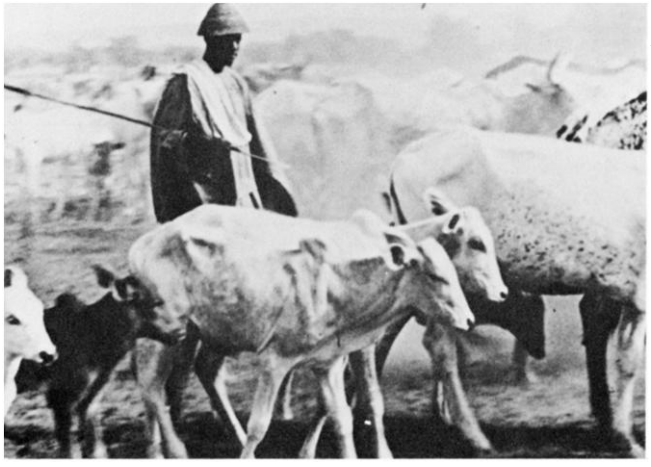
Boviala is working on a 16mm single-system camera, entirely autonomous, that allows simultaneous sound recording while adopting the process used in Super 8 for automatic sound. If it works out, I think that cinema and television will never be the same. It'll be a real face-to-face dialogue, recorded by a camera as small as a tape recorder. There won't be any need for a crew. And the "victim," the Christian devoured by the lion, namely the camera . . . Cinema will become completely subjective.

When we made *Chronique d'un Été,* it undermined all the previously used television techniques. From then on, people started walking with the camera, up to the ridiculous point where they shot in 35mm, with the camera on a tripod, and they shook the tripod a bit so that the image would move as if it were hand-held . . .

Depardon has already used this method while shooting the birth of *Le Matin de Paris* with a sound camera to which he attached a gun mike and a small SL Nagra. He was alone among the journalists and the result is terrific.

In my films, I have a sound technician. But in Africa, when I shoot in Mali with the Dogon, the sound man is a Dogon. In Niger, I have two or three local technicians who work with me—I never use foreigners.

So, objectivity consists of inserting what one knows into what one films, inserting one's self with a tool which will provoke the emergence of a certain reality. Here I join Flaherty's theory, who in fact was a man of practice rather than a theoretician. I have often been reproached for speaking about *cinéma vérité.* They said about *Chronique d'un Été* that it couldn't be the truth, that truth doesn't exist in the cinema. When Vertov spoke of Kino-Pravda, it wasn't simply filming the journal *Pravda.* It was an attempt to search for the truth. But he said it very clearly: the ciné-vérité is the truth of cinema, the truth that one can show in the cinema with a mechanical eye and an electronic ear. When I have a camera and a microphone, I'm not my usual self, I'm in a strange state, in a *ciné-transe.* This is the objectivity that one can expect, being perfectly conscious that the camera is there and that people know it. From that moment, we live in an audio-visual galaxy: a new truth emerges, *cinéma vérité,* which has nothing to do with



LA CHASSE AU LION A L'ARC

normal reality. I would never talk that way to you had there not been a tape-recorder here . . .

In La Chasse au Lion à l'Arc *you show the telegram that invited you.*

The American version was cut by 20 minutes by the distributor. Those were 20 minutes that explain the whole story and where I play a subjective role. The narration in French is very subjective. For example, when I say that the mountains by which we pass have been forgotten and we call them "Mountains of the Moon," the mountains of crystal—it's from Tarzan's memories. It's a terribly subjective film. This is why I constantly show the car—there was no reason for it.

And yet there's a distance: when the lioness dies, we look from a distance, with respect . . .

Yes, but the distance is there because I was afraid . . . It's normal. Secondly, because it's very impressive—everyone was impressed. So, at that moment, I was subjectively in the same mood. The death of the lioness, for which I have often been reproached—they said it was terrible—of course, it's terrible! Death is terrible and it's like that! If we filmed Hitler's death, it would be the terrible death of a terrible man, but that's how it is.

And yet the death scene is very beautiful in contrast to a film like Mondo Cane, *which is repulsive.*

Yes, but this is the point of view. The film was shot during a long period of time and I tried to understand what was going on around me. The hunters had the "privilege" of bringing about the death of the animals, but it was very risky. The commentary is true: the hunter who killed the lion's cub lost his own son the following year because of it. I wanted to show that there was a very strange relationship between hunter and prey.

At that time, I was influenced by an old American science-fiction film made in 1932: *The Most Dangerous Game* (The Hounds of Zaroff), directed by Ernest Schoedsack. Two rich Americans, a guy and a girl, are stranded on a Pacific island and are received by a Russian count who plays the piano and tells them he's a hunter. He says he hunts men. He gives them a two-day headstart, providing the man with a knife for self-defense. He himself has a bow. Whoever wins, gets the woman. It's a fantastic material for Freudian interpretation—relations between hunter and prey.

The lion in my film has a name and he's known, loved and respected. There's a lot of respect for the lioness because she's been beaten. After that film, I couldn't go hunting anymore. What's interesting is that we never see the lion: he was always there, merging with the vegetation, but we never saw him. His presence was felt.

How about your own presence in Chronique d'un Été? *We mostly see Morin.*

Because I was often behind the camera. Maybe it was also a bit hypocritical on my part: all the people in the film were Morin's friends, so I was a sort of an observer, having an observer's impunity. It's not a very nice role. In fact, the relations between Morin and the young leftist intellectuals, here the French Communist Party—he has left it since . . . I was terrified by this film: these people, Regis Debray and the others, were all desperate at twenty. The only person who has evolved during the film is Marceline. She is very shy in the beginning but becomes an actress in the end. It's an extraordinary transformation.

I was deeply impressed by the scene where she walks in Les Halles, becoming more and more emotional while the camera becomes increasingly detached.

It's the first two shots we shot with Brault. It was the discovery of another cinema. All of a sudden, we came out of what we were doing—we started shooting with a blimped Arriflex on a tripod, and I didn't like it too much. So I told Dauman, the producer, that we had to have a

new camera and should invite Michel Brault who alone could teach us something.

It was a gamble. We didn't know what was going to happen. I liked Les Halles, which was destroyed by Mr. Pompidou. It was beautiful: Les Halles was empty on a Sunday in August. We chose the Place de la Concorde and we couldn't hear what she was saying since she wore a tape-recorder around her neck. She was the only one to hear her own words. In Les Halles, we wanted to track backwards and Brault said we should put the camera on the back seat of the Renault 2cv. We put the motor on and pushed it more quickly than Marceline's pace. Nobody looked through the view-finder: we didn't know what image we were getting. It was surrealistic because we did it unconsciously, and Marceline, in that decor, started thinking of a train station and when we returned she started talking about her brother, the train station where he had been deported . . . She was completely sincere and when she said later on "I was acting," it was because she was shy and wanted to appear above all that. It's a bit dangerous to make a film like that.

Psychodrama?

Yes, it modified their lives. For Marceline, it was OK. She became the wife of Joris Ivens and with him she shot these films on China. Regis Debray left for Cuba to make a film on Che Guevara. Jean-Pierre Sergent (Marceline's lover in the film) also became involved with the cinema: he made a reportage on Algeria with Marceline at the time of Ben Bella and it was banned because of Boumedienne's coup d'état. Michel Brault has become a director. And of course Rivette . . . Edgar Morin was very frustrated because he thought he could reach objectivity, without personalizing things. This was my influence. He got divorced and married a black woman from Montreal, who was a friend of Claude Jutra, himself a friend of Michel Brault, and she brought a smile into his life. He became one of the most cheerful of sociologists and *le gai savoir* is quite rare these days.

All the people in the film were directly influenced by it, except Angelo the worker. He was fired from the Renault plant where he worked because of his involvement with film and was making a living as a worker in Billancourt Studios. There he created a trade union where none had existed—of the stage-hands—and was fired for political reasons. Edgar Morin was involved with a publishing house called Editions du Seuil and hired Angelo to work there. In six months, he was going to create a union there and Morin said: "No, you can't do this to me!" Finally, we gave him money to buy a small workshop in Levallois, where he worked as a mechanic.

Yes, and Marilou became a stills photographer for Bertolucci and Godard and made a film in Rome.

Chronique d'un Été *had an incredible influence on the New Wave.*

Yes, it was nice. We played with fire . . .

A few words about the contribution of the New Wave to French cinema.

For me, it marked the moment that cinema came out of the claws of the film industry to become an art. Before the New Wave, it was impossible to make a film: it was forbidden to buy 35mm film without the permission of the Centre du Cinéma. When Melville shot *Le Silence de la Mer,* he had to steal the film. The New Wave was the first reaction to the terrible threat to all art: corporatism. When a corporation protects itself and prevents others from entering, which was the case with the cinema, it is what we call in French *le fils d'archevêque,* the archbishop's son: you have to belong to the gang, your father is in the group and you're admitted because of it. All of a sudden, the New Wave said: "We'll make films without decor, without actors, without authorization and almost without cameras."

The man who played the essential role in all this was Roberto Rossellini. He came to Paris with his fame and Ingrid Bergman and told us: "You can make all the films you want. I'll find you the money in the US or in Italy." He asked each of us to tell his story. We dreamt with him in his hotel and did our best. One day, he disappeared—there was no money and no films, but we had already prepared our projects. He was the real stimulant. The first films by Rivette and Godard were stimulated by this madman. We loved Roberto enormously. He was god to us. He said: "*Voilà*! The old cinema is dead. It's up to you now!"

The New Wave opened the door but, unfortu-

nately, it's closed again now. People are afraid to make a mistake, take a risk. Truffaut's *400 Blows* made about $800,000 that he could invest in future films. So he became a businessman. Godard could have fallen into this trap, but being completely mad, he evaded it.

I'm lucky that my films didn't have commercial success and that I was a paid researcher for the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, so I could do anything, take any risk.

Now there's no new New Wave, but it'll come. It's in the process of emerging. Just as 16mm played a crucial role in the opening of cinema, now the Super 8 and video will change everything. Now you can make marvelous films with Super 8 sync-sound single-system. The University of Nanterre this year gave the first three diplomas for films shot in Super 8. One was about the second-hand clothing merchants in Paris and it cost $100. Another was shot in the Metro and also cost $100. The people from Kodak paid the cost of the print to show it as an example of what could be done with Super 8.

Alexandre Astruc spoke in the beginning of the New Wave about the *camera-stylo* (camera-pen). Now we have a *camera-crayon* (camera-pencil) that can be put in every hand. It ceases to be someone's monopoly, no longer are there the sacred forests of Hollywood . . .

Your camera is more mobile in Cocorico! Monsieur Poulet *than in* La Chasse au Lion à l'Arc. *Why?*

In *Chasse au Lion à l'Arc* we used an old Bell & Howell which was very stable in front and since I took very short shots—20 seconds at most—I avoided moving it too much because it could stop in the middle of a movement. In *Cocorico! Monsieur Poulet* I had a camera with an electric motor, which gave me 10 minutes of autonomy at a time, and it enabled me to take sequence-length shots. The discovery of sync-cinema is the discovery of real-time in film. My dream is to start shooting a few minutes before the climax and continue. *Cocorico!* is made completely of sequence-length shots: like in newsreels, we never stopped. We edited it, but very little.

It's not the subject that dictates camera movement?

I don't know. There shouldn't be a relationship. If you start making theories about my films, you're losing. You should just follow the movement. If there's a theory, there are no longer improvisation and creativity. When I read what the *Cahiers du Cinéma* people write about my films, I'm very surprised. Even if it's true, it's unconscious. I prefer to speak about *ciné-transe.* When I have a camera, I'm someone completely different, so don't ask me why I did what I did.

So, it's emotional rather than intellectual?

Certainly. You make a film with the heart rather than the brain. It's essential.

What do you think of the documentary films of Chris Marker and Louis Malle?

The whole *India* series by Malle is fantastic. It's the most beautiful thing ever made because it's the eye of a foreigner, which is rare. It's not ethnography. It's the first glance at a strange culture. So, it's total curiosity. It was very courageous to make.

I think that Chris Marker is too intelligent. That's his problem: his brain keeps interfering. The series he made on Chile is too intelligent. In the Alain Resnais short *Les Statues Meurent Aussi,* Chris Marker's commentary is a masterpiece. But when you create masterpieces it's annoying because you can't improve them . . . It's brilliant and the quality of the form tends to obscure the message.

In your films do you see form and message as related?

Absolutely. If there's no message, there's no form. I've always been wary of beautiful photography. It means there's nothing in it. The beauty is in the core which comes out: all of a sudden, an emotion emerges and it's completely unexpected.

Surrealism is something that has always impressed me. I believe in chance. The most beautiful shots I get happen when my lightmeter shows there's no light. No cameraman will shoot but I do it anyway and something happens. I strongly believe in this total improvisation. I am my first spectator when I look through the viewfinder. It's very strange to walk with the camera and sit in the screening room: be at the same time my own critic. But I stay away from *la belle image.* Aestheticism is the great danger.

Why do you prefer to work with collaborators—

co-directors rather than assistants, or is it simply a question of terminology?

No, I prefer it because there are a lot of things I don't know. I knew nothing about France in 1960, so the co-director was Morin. *Cocorico!* is a work of collective improvisation: Damouré, Lam and myself. Each of us had his role, like in a jam session.

Speaking about music, can a musical rhythm dictate the rhythm of a scene?

No, never, except if the music is part of the scene. I use very little background music, except in *La Chasse au Lion à l'Arc:* there is some guitar music which creates a war atmosphere and which is repeated in *Babatu.* It creates an epic dimension. It's an indication of something else, then. But I detest film music—it's like pretty images, enveloping something in a pretty wrapping, as if it were a Christmas present: cheap but with a magnificent wrapping. It's what's inside that counts. This is the role of music in cinema, except in the Western. There, it gives an epic dimension—it indicates falseness. Everything that is announced as false is accompanied by music.

Are you optimistic?

Of course, and you?

Sometimes.

Why sometimes? And the rest of the time?

There are doubts.

Doubts are optimism. There is nothing more pessimistic than a puritan. The moment you have doubts, everything is possible.

DON WILLIS

A Singing Blackbird, and Georgian Cinema

In the last few years films from the Soviet Republic of Georgia have been getting some overdue recognition at film festivals and retrospectives around the world, but they still qualify as one of the better-kept secrets of international cinema. The relatively well known *Pirosmani* (1971), by Georgi Shengelaya, is only one of a number of sharply stylized, idiosyncratic Georgian films currently making the archive circuit, in a package put together by National Film Theatre of London programmer John Gillett.

No one film is like another. *Molba,* or *The Prayer,* (Abuladze, 1968), is a genre of one, an epic "poem" of apocalyptic brutality and horror ironically framed by a fervent profession of absolute faith in God. Alternately static in its recitations ("I'm sick to death of tombs" is one of the less fortunate speeches) and awesome in its Revelations-like imagery, *Molba* is guaranteed to overwhelm one way or another. *My Grandmother* (Mikaberidze, 1929) is a savage, Vigo-esque satire of Russian bureaucracy employing fantasy, dreams, stop-motion animation, double and triple exposure, slow motion, etc. Sample nightmare image: a lazy bureaucrat speared through the chest by a giant fountain pen. The film isn't just an argument for diligence. It goes way beyond plain argument into outrage, malicious glee, and comic horror: in one sequence a woman and her little daughter Charleston giddily in delight at their breadwinner's supposed success at the office ("I've such a good husband!"), oblivious of the just-fired husband hanging rather foolishly from a noose on the chandelier. (He proves inept at suicide too.) This astonishing silent comedy should be at least a page in future film history books. You wonder why it isn't in the current ones.

Almost conventional—by Georgian standards—but also quite likeable and full of visual verve

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are *Ballad of Khevsur* (Managadze, 1965), *The First Swallow* (Mchelidze, 1975) and *Romancers,* or *The Eccentrics* (Eldar Shengelaya, Georgi's brother; 1974). Shengelaya's central conceit—a flying machine that soars on (figurative) wings of love—is unsubtle, but charming, and his fantasy has a lovely visual and thematic design although, as in his earlier, less interesting *An Unusual Exhibition* (1968), his sense of character remains earthbound. In such heady company, mediocrity is almost reassuring, and is well represented by *Salt for Svanetia* and *The Letter That Was Never Sent* (Kalatazov, 1930 and 1959, respectively). The camerawork in the latter is all clichés: hand-held shots for fast action, fast tracks to suggest exhilaration, off-angle shots for everything —and the story is a Siberian low-adventure drama that alternates between a foolish sort of national optimism and easy challenges to that optimism.

Perhaps the most gifted Georgian film-maker of all is Otar Ioseliani, director of *When the Leaves Fall* (1967), *A Singing Blackbird* or *Day by Day* (1971) and *Pastoral* (1975). *When the Leaves Fall* is about an agreeable young man who becomes a foreman in a wine factory, and who, despite pressure to get the wine bottled quickly (even if it's inferior), refuses to yield. He dumps gelatine into vat 49 to bring it up to standard, even though that means a two-week settling period will be necessary and the factory will fall behind in its program. Before, when the factory workers went out and ordered wine together at a restaurant, they had to inspect it to see if it was their own, then check the date it was bottled. ("It's ours." "March 25." Abrupt exit, en masse.) They're about to bend again before authority, and have even begun pumping ("Tell your friends not to buy August 12"), when Niko halts production.

The subject of *When the Leaves Fall* is authority and resistance, whether the voice of authority is a corrupt boss, a nagging mother, a weak friend or a girl's omnipresent thug of an ex-boy friend. Niko's friend and co-worker tells him, "You must learn how to get along in life," and even the boss's little boy advises him, "Your tactics are wrong." In this film's world *everyone* knows better than you do. Niko's friend does all the proper, smart things. When they apply for work at the factory he says he doesn't drink or play cards, while Niko admits to a little of both, not knowing that, to the boss, you don't admit to a life apart from work. His friend, very properly, tips a cigarette butt that lands on the rim of an ashtray into the tray; Niko tosses his cigarette on the sidewalk. (Inevitably, a passerby orders him, absurdly, "Pick up that butt.")

The film's cleverly worked out etiquette for cigarettes instructs you to give the boss a light, but not, my God, a stranger who happens to be sitting at your table intruding on your tête-à-tête. Niko just doesn't know what's in his own best interests. He lets the stranger sit down, lights his cigarette and even, apparently, lets him get away with his order of coffee, while the girl waits, not quite believing such idiot generosity, or politeness.

Niko is called, to his face, "green," "stubborn," and, facetiously, by the girl, Marina, a "man of principle." The terms are intended to encourage passivity and discourage initiative. But he resists, and his boss, unaccountably, praises his unauthorized addition of the gelatine. Even the boss, it seems, must yield before a higher authority: the accomplished fact. The film, with its sense of life-as-obstacle and people as impossible, is very good, if occasionally rather cryptic in its imagery and odd sound-track pyrotechnics. Its surface charm is somewhat deceptive—the world of love and work it describes is almost chilling in its systematic isolating of the hero, who, finding he can trust no one, becomes an unreasonable man in an equally unreasonable world.

The hero of Ioseliani's exquisitely imagined *A Singing Blackbird,* confronted with life's dismaying variety, tries to sample a little of everything on the table and, for a while, succeeds. The rare work of art which, like this one, suggests that it's possible for life to be too much of a good thing requires an artist who can see all that the world offers, and at the same time understand the provisions of that offer. In the novella "A Faint Heart," for instance, Dostoevsky has his hero Vasya, surfeited with happiness, finally lose his mind.

Ioseliani's Giha, an orchestra tympanist, has his crowded daily timetable calculated "down to the second." If he can't be everywhere at once,

he at least tries to be, putting in a brief, precisely timed nightly appearance at the concert hall, taking a friend to the doctor, playing the piano for his aunt's birthday party at home, joining the chorus at a reunion afterwards. In a way the world was made for him. Superficially, he harmonizes with everyone and everything in it. The more people he meets, the more friends he makes. He's instantly engaging, a good—a great—natural mixer, a nimble water skidder on life's surface.

But in another way the world isn't his at all. If he fits in everywhere, it's by a hair, as his mad last-minute dashes into the orchestra pit suggest. Giha, in developing his social and musical gifts extensively rather than intensively, arguably exploits them to the fullest. That is, he's talented, but perhaps in too many directions. "Dilettante" derives from the Latin for "to delight," and Giha is an embodiment of the word. Is he right to worry that his life is a "flat zero?" Do the splinters of friendship that compose his life signal "happiness" or "emptiness" or something of each? *A Singing Blackbird* is neither a mindless celebration of a free spirit nor a lecture on the consequences of irresponsibility. If Giha pleases everyone, he also slights everyone. The more friends he makes, the less time he has for each of them. The moment's pause of recollection by his friend the watchmaker at the end is the measure of how much he'll be missed by everyone—a little.

Intimations of danger punctuate the film: a large flower pot that crashes just behind Giha at one point, a building demolition, sidewalk explosions that turn out to be part of a movie being shot. These peripheral jolts are like subliminal signals, signs that a sense of order is somehow being violated. Looking at the scene through the camera viewfinder, Giha asks the film crew's cameraman, "What are those lines for?" as we see, in a subjective insert, the viewfinder cross hairs (and, behind them, the actors). The odd link between potential danger and "lines" turns out to be a crucial one: at the end Giha, jaywalking across a busy, four-lane street, fends off a bus in the first lane, only to be hit (and apparently killed) by a car hidden behind the bus in the second. A crowd forms and disperses. Ending the sequence is a high-angle long shot of the empty street emphasizing the "operative" element: the network of broken and solid white lines. Giha's ignorance of the provisions of life—the "lines"—proves fatal.

WHEN THE LEAVES FALL

If he makes life yield to his own *extensive* sense of order, it's with too little regard for the prevailing intensive order, which is based on compartmentalization and specialization and autocratically brooks no bending of rules or crossing of lines. At one point, as Giha watches a man playing the piano alone on stage, there is a sense of a mysterious gulf between the two, the soloist

and the harmonist, and it's Giha who's the odd man out. The last shot in the film is an extended, subjective insert of a watch mechanism, as the watchmaker focusses on it and starts it running again. The film ends inside the specialist's lens. We don't see any lines here but, by a sort of mental superimposition—camera viewfinder/traffic markers/lens—we know they're there, and we know why—after Giha's death—the mechanism is running smoothly again: order has been restored, the challenge to it eliminated. A quiet masterpiece, *A Singing Blackbird* poses the deceptively unassuming question, "Must one commit oneself?" There's so much to life that to dwell on a part of it is to miss the rest.

A Note on Ioseliani's Latest Film, PASTORALE

The determination to convey Georgian life in the most truthful manner possible is indicated with cinematic understatement, perhaps a gentler instructiveness, in *Pastorale*. Ioseliani has placed the story among farmers in a remote area of the countryside, who speak a dialect almost incomprehensible to the average Georgian. *Pastorale* is very much a visual tone-poem. The introductory sequences concern a bored business executive in Tbilisi, interviewing his clients and eating a solitary luncheon from a tray in his office. Suddenly, one is transferred to the country village, where a quintet of young musicians arrives to spend a brief period of practice and relaxation. They are contemporary, a bit world-weary, but as unprepared in their own way for the humdrum routine and naive realities of their bucolic surroundings. Ioseliani's sharp perceptions are constantly aimed toward sardonic juxtapositions, in the subtlest sense, to establish those wistful ironies of human behavior that exist when cultural patterns coexist behind invisible barriers. The unspoken condescension of the three girls and two boys from Tbilisi toward those around them is tempered with a resigned, polite tolerance. On the other hand, the villagers evoke the most tremendous emotional sympathy from the spectator. Like the people in Rouquier's *Farrébeque* or Dovzhenko's *Earth*, they are timeless embodiments of all humanity, and a mingled sadness and regret is felt mostly because they can never know, fully, the remnants of whatever civilization lies over the hills beyond.

The village is not at all cozy-cute, but unflinchingly grubby; the mud, poverty, insouciant pigs, goats and chickens, plus the eternal outhouse, are just *there*—the labor, too, for the women do everything without modern conveniences: without kitchens, they cook outdoors, plucking hens, broiling meat and fish on skewers, with the children standing about, waving smoke from the kettles. An old woman waters each grapevine from a single container, and groups of farmers rhythmically thresh wheat in the open fields. There is no entertainment. The men drink outside a cafe, engaging in minor shouting matches. Trains pass in the distance, and occasionally, a tourist bus will be held up by a cart on the road, just long enough for a young peasant girl to stop kneading dough and exchange a long glance with a mustachioed male passenger (Ioseliani himself).

When the sounds of classical music are heard, as the quintet rehearses, the villagers, especially the children, look upward toward the windows in pleased wonder; another world opening within their consciousness. Asya, the young maidservant, in her first contact with outsiders, is shyly innocent and on the brink of life. She is attracted to the cellist, but totally restrained, confining her admiration to peeks and humble politeness. Gradually, the musicians begin to appreciate the villagers, and tape recordings of folk songs and music. Ioseliani's mild social criticisms are amusing: an old man who apparently has made his living by gathering leftover hay is admonished by a caretaker-on-horseback who also takes away the man's scythe. Later, the man is seen gathering more hay with a *smaller* scythe. As two "fishermen" detonate small bombs in a creek and scoop up the stunned fish, the caretaker arrives to arrest them, only to discover that the landowner has sent them to catch the fish.

When the musicians leave, Asya is left with a recording of marching-band music as a memento; the village is left in its eternal atmosphere of work, silence, and Nature, and Ioseliani returns us to his Tbilisi businessman-at-home. His white-haired

Otar Ioseliani (standing, right) during the shooting of PASTORALE

mother and his wife, both docile, knit away in city comfort. The young daughter turns out to be one of the musicians and she brings back some apples from the village. Her father sits quietly and munches one of them; from the faraway farms and flowering cherry trees, it is his only link with the ancient, the *real* Georgia.

—ALBERT JOHNSON

BILL NICHOLS

Fred Wiseman's Documentaries: Theory and Structure

The history of thought is the history of its models. —Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*

The final film is a theory about the event, about the subject in the film. —Frederick Wiseman, interview

A problem plagues me. Namely this: modern film theory examines films as systems of signs whose significance derives primarily from internal relationships and not from external reference to another realm or system (usually taken to be "reality"). Traditional film theory has assumed a certain transparency between sign (image) and referent (reality). Eisenstein sought to transcend it, Bazin to celebrate it. And even today this assumption remains most powerful in documentary film study, an area to which modern theory has given scant attention. What happens, however, if we refuse to trust the image's transparency, if we refuse to take on faith this apparent re-presentation of reality itself? What happens if we hypothesize that this transparency is an effect produced by work in and upon a system of signs and codes, that it is the site of formal and ideological strategies of considerable significance in their own right? This article seeks to answer these questions in relation to the documentary films of Frederick Wiseman.

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ported, public institutions: *Titicut Follies* (1967) about a mental institution, *High School* (1969), *Law and Order* (1969) about a city police force, *Hospital* (1971), *Basic Training* (1971) about the US Army, *Juvenile Court* (1973), *Primate* (1974) about federally-supported primate research, and *Welfare* (1975).[1] Partly because these kinds of institutions are familiar to most viewers and partly because of the films' structure, a strong tendency exists to read the films like Rorschach tests in which responses are a function of predispositions toward the institutions or towards Wiseman's distinctive, and subjective, style. Before analyzing this style in detail it may therefore be useful to precipitate some of these predispositions by way of a few summary points.

1. Wiseman disavows conventional notions of tact, breaking through what would otherwise be ideological[2] constraints of politeness, respect for privacy, queasiness in the face of the grotesque or taboo, the impulse to accentuate the positive, etc. (A two-minute-long take of a patient vomiting in *Hospital* is one striking example of this aspect of Wiseman's approach.) Wiseman's "tactlessness" allows him not to be taken in by institutional rhetoric; it helps him disclose the gap between rhetoric and practice. But this lack of tact also pulls Wiseman's cinema toward the realm of voyeurism and visual pleasure; a very striking aspect of his films on first viewing, this threatens to block access to those more conceptual or formal strategies discussed here. Tactlessness thus provides a tension which requires further exploration but lies beyond the scope of the present discussion.

PRIMATE

2. Wiseman's films are documentary primarily in their *cinéma vérité* approach to recording the pro-filmic event (discussed further below). They are secondarily documentary in re-presenting a recognizable aspect of social existence in our culture (encounters with tax-supported institutions). This is a distinctive choice of subject among *cinéma-vérité* film-makers and challenges assumptions about the individual as the locus of social interaction (and, in the guise of "characters," as the locus of narrative).

3. Wiseman's films fall within the experimental film-making tradition in terms of their overall formal organization and within the narrative tradition in their local organization (the level of the sequence). Wiseman achieves a cinematic whole akin to the overall structure of films by Jean-Luc Godard, Michael Snow, Bruce Baillie, or Bruce Conner while at the level of the sequence he devises an editing pattern similar in its effect to the continuity editing of classical narrative. The overall structure of Wiseman's films is decidedly non-narrative (lacking closure, a diachronic trajectory, and the full deployment of the codes of actions and enigmas which usually pose and subsequently resolve puzzles or mysteries by means of the characters' activities.)[3] At the same time the overall structure is built from facets themselves narrative-like (in their construction of a singular diegesis—the imaginary space and time of a narrative).

Wiseman's films all utilize the documentary mode of indirect address, that is, the viewer is not explicitly acknowledged by the film: characters do not look at the camera nor speak directly to us, nor does a narrator speak directly to us as in the classic voice-of-god commentary of a film like *The River* (Pare Lorentz, 1937). Although an exploratory attempt has been made to consider direct-address documentaries in the light of modern film theory, the indirect-address documentary remains virgin territory.[4]

Wiseman's films thus fall within the amorphous category of *cinéma vérité* documentary, but they also belong to a more distinct sub-category, characterized by their almost exclusive use of indirect address (the absence of commentary, interviews with the film-maker, and even extra-diegetic music or sound effects), the lack of staged or reenacted events (acknowledging but minimizing

the "staging" provoked by the camera's presence), and the reliance upon social actors (individuals, or "characters," acting their normal social roles). This kind of *cinéma vérité* adopts a modified form of the continuity editing found in classical narrative films to present an imaginary spatial and temporal universe (the diegesis). The practitioners of this style include Richard Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker, the Maysles brothers, William Jersey, John Marshall, Asen Balicki, David MacDougall, Allan King and Craig Gilbert, but Wiseman's films stand out as a particularly pure example.

Stephen Mamber claims that this kind of *cinéma vérité* involves "a faith in unmanipulated reality, a refusal to tamper with life as it presents itself."[5] The ghost of André Bazin notwithstanding, neither Wiseman nor the others mentioned create a neutral or objective style; indeed we often hear charges of manipulation or bias against Wiseman. His choice of "characters," of types of encounter, and his choice of camera angle and distance (especially extreme close-ups) are obviously expressive indicators within Wiseman's stylistic repertoire.[6] From such crucial, ideologically informed aspects of style it is possible to gauge Wiseman's attitude toward his subject. The concern here, however, will be with larger formal questions in the hope of teasing open those ideological implications of style embedded in the organizing principles of the parts, the whole, and the part/whole relationships of Wiseman's films. Let us begin by noting how Wiseman's own style departs from classical narrative.

First, Wiseman's style is statistically different. Barry Salt analyzed a variety of feature films and found that the average shot length for classic Hollywood films was around 9-10 seconds.[7] Average shot length for a 30-min. passage from Wiseman's *Hospital* is 32 seconds. Such results are not statistically rigorous but are highly suggestive. A tabulation of closeness of shot (from extreme close-up to very long shot) for the same passage from *Hospital* also reveals a significant departure from the classical pattern: Wiseman's films rely far more heavily upon the closest shots with fewer medium to long shots than the narrative films analyzed by Salt.

Second, Wiseman's style does not function strictly within a narrative context. The whole is not organized as a narrative but more poetically, as a mosaic; only the parts have a diegetic unity. Between sequences editing seldom establishes a chronological relationship: sequences follow each other consecutively but without a clearly marked temporal relationship. The whole thus tends toward poetry (metaphor, synchronicity, paradigmatic relations)—an all-at-once slice through an institutional matrix re-presented in time—rather than narrative.

BASIC TRAINING

Although "mosaic" is a useful term to describe the structure of Wiseman's films, they are mosaics of a distinctive kind. In a conventional mosaic the *tesserae* (facets) merge to yield a coherent whole when seen from a distance whereas an individual facet conveys little sense of the overall design.[8] The *tesserae* (or sequences) of a Wiseman film are already coherent and do not merge into one impression or one narrative tale so much as supplement each other (with each sequence conveying a recognizable aspect of the overall design). The whole of a mosaic is almost invariably embedded in a larger architectural whole, but such a larger whole is absent in Wiseman's case; not only do the films stand on their own, they offer little overt acknowledgment that the institutions under study directly relate to a larger social context. (Though we might, perhaps, think of each Wiseman film as a facet in a mosaic constituted by his overall oeuvre.) Both kinds of mosaic, however, clearly exhibit their facets as facets, a strategy that associates the structure of Wiseman's films with cinematic collage as well as traditional mosaic.

The addition of new facets in Wiseman's films helps complete our picture but also constitutes it in such a way that completion in any absolute sense becomes impossible (each new facet proposes a new lack at the same time as it fills in a previous one). Thus, whereas a narrative can be complete when the ending resolves a lack initiated in the beginning, Wiseman's films lack narrative closure itself. They are associational rather than expository, or poetic rather than assertive or narrative.

Much debate revolves around definitions of narrative structure but, without attempting to resolve this debate, it may still be possible to specify at least one consequence of the difference between Wiseman's mosaic structure and narrative structure. Narrative requires the adoption of assumptions or codes governing the inclusion, exclusion, and arrangement of events. Will Wright argues that "these assumptions amount to an explanation of the events, in the sense that they provide reasons why the final events follow from, are the result of, the earlier events."[9] Put differently, narrative accounts for a change between initial and final states by means of "an intervening description of actions or occurrences that account for that change."[10]

Lacking narrative structure, Wiseman's films also lack this kind of linear-causality explanation of events. They do, however, pose a theory of the events they describe—one consonant with a mosaic structure and at variance with a model of linear causality. Eschewing narrative on the one hand and the documentary mode of direct address on the other (where an explanation can be explicitly announced by a narrator), Wiseman adopts an alternative principle of organization with a corresponding basic shift in assumptions about the arrangement of and relationship between events. This principle is: mosaic structure of the whole but narrative structure of the parts (the sequences). It assumes that social events are multiply-caused, and must be analyzed as a web of interconnecting influences and patterns. It is dialectical rather than mechanical.

Though Wiseman's films are not narratives, his sequences tend to be of two types in Metz's classification of the *grande syntagmatique* of classical narrative film: "scenes" and "descriptive syntagmas." Unlike the scene, the descriptive syntagma does not convey a sense of temporal progression; objects shown in successive images enjoy a relationship of spatial coexistence.[11] In Wiseman's films such descriptive sequences are not full-blown: they are more suggestive than wholly assertive. Through their very brevity they acquire a surplus of meaning that takes off from the specificity of each shot and evokes the general milieu (the institution) from which they are taken. Wiseman's scenes represent "a spatio-temporal integrality experienced as being without flaws . . . those brusque effects of appearance or disappearance . . ."[12] but they tend to blur into what Metz calls the "ordinary sequence" where the temporal order is discontinuous and unorganized.[13]

We may also analyze the spatio-temporal flow of scenes and ordinary sequences into what Vladimir Propp calls "functions" (and Barthes "actions"): "a noun expressing an action" or "an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action."[14] Here, however, the difference in overall structure of Wiseman's films compared to narrative films makes itself felt. Wiseman's sequences are like narrative sequences diegetically, and thus can be roughly catalogued in Metz's taxonomy; but they are quite unlike narrative sequences in the nature and arrangement of the functions. Since Wiseman's functions are in fact governed by social interactions in institutions they differ from Propp's more "mythological" narrative functions in several ways.

If we say that agents carry out functions (such as "the hero leaves home," "the hero is tested," "the villain is defeated," "the hero returns home") and are individuated as characters, then these principles apply to Wiseman's films as well as to narratives. But in Wiseman's films the agents carry out functions determined by the institutional structure in which they are embedded rather than by a narrative structure. The institution imposes certain functions and excludes others; it acts like a code or a *langue* similar to a narrative code. Like a narrative code it is extracinematic but capable of being recruited into a cinematic structure.

One striking characteristic of this institutional code (or the portion Wiseman considers) is that

the kinds of agents it requires are very limited in number. In fact only two dominate: the hero and his complement to which can be added, secondarily, helpers. The hero is roughly analogous to the fictional hero in structural analyses but the complement is unlike the fictional villain: the complement is the character necessary for the hero to carry out the functions assigned him by the institutional code. Sociologically, such processes are described under the rubric of role-playing, but what is peculiar to the institutional role-playing studied by Wiseman is that it always involves a complementary relationship in Gregory Bateson's sense: "To this category we may refer all those cases in which the behavior and aspirations of the members of two groups are fundamentally different."[15] In fact, they are usually oppositional as in assertive/submissive or nurturing/dependent behavior and tend toward schismogenic escalation—increased assertiveness begets increased submissiveness—and the breakdown of the system unless moderated by negative feedback (a feature present in institutions but seldom detailed in Wiseman's films). This schismogenic quality also corresponds very closely to Marx's notion of class struggle: the "fundamental differences" alluded to by Bateson are often class differences. Placement of the encounters between institutions and clients in these terms, however, is not attempted by Wiseman even though the encounters themselves cannot be fully understood without reference to class and class struggle.

Additionally, the institutional code governs the interaction of numerous heroes and complements in as much as it governs the relationships between existing social groups or classes. It is feasible to isolate a hero and follow the sequence of functions he performs and this is a choice many documentaries make—for example, *A Time for Burning* (William Jersey, 1966) or *A Married Couple* (Allan King, 1970). But Wiseman opts not to do this. Instead of following one hero through a large set of functions as in narrative, Wiseman follows many heroes through a small set of functions (each hero's performance of a function usually constituting one facet of the overall mosaic). The heroes are often individuated as characters but a repertoire of characters is picked up, followed, and dropped as they perform a few select functions over and over.

JUVENILE COURT

Wiseman's mosaic structure does not establish a fixed series of moves (in Propp's analysis, an invariant succession of functions) that could constitute a narrative whole. Instead functions recur throughout a film, but individual characters do not. Characters, as represented by social actors, carry out functions and thereby give individuality to the agent types, but this relationship is not locked into a single mold: there are many characters, there is no "star." The processes of identification between viewer and hero/actor/star that occur in most narrative films are side-stepped as well as the ideological consequences of fusing these three distinct realms into one seemingly coherent image.[16] Wiseman's films move away from this imaginary homogeneity toward what Stephen Heath calls "figure": the character as a "point of dispersion, a kind of disarticulation."[17] This reasserts a dialectical relationship between cinematic structure and social reality by refusing to subsume or conflate the two through imaginary unities like "star."

Thus the accumulation of scenes in Wiseman yields a metaphorical effect rather than a metonymic one and narrative succumbs to poetry. A displacement of the comfortable on-looker positioning of the spectator that dominates classical narrative is achieved, akin to that of many experimental films. This contrasts with films by other *cinéma vérité* practitioners where a full-fledged narrative analysis along Proppian lines may prove instructive.

Insofar as Wiseman substitutes characters for one another in variations on the performance of a few functions it would seem likely that these functions could be isolated and identified. Util-

izing the procedures described by Will Wright in *Sixguns and Society* I have attempted this for *Titicut Follies, High School, Law and Order, Hospital, Basic Training,* and *Juvenile Court.* The result is the following eleven functions:

1. The hero is a member of and acts on behalf of an institution; he enjoys a special status.
2. The complement is initially a member of society; he lacks special status.
3. The hero determines whether to interact with a social actor as his complement or not. (This involves "fact-finding" in *Juvenile Court* and *Law and Order* and "diagnosis" in *Hospital* and *Titicut Follies.*)
4. The hero isolates his complement from society at large into a special group under his control.
5. The hero imparts values or knowledge (social or institutional) to his complement. (The complement may contest the hero's actions but usually to little avail; this is discussed further below since contestation is more generally a key contributor to social change.)
6. The hero accepts his complement as one of his own. (In the graduation and promotion ceremonies in *Basic Training* primarily, though hierarchical rankings are retained.)
7. The hero seeks to control or modify the behavior of his complement. (This may involve long or short term modification—sentence terms in *Juvenile Court,* "discipline" in *High School,* arrests in *Law and Order,* and physical or mental modification—medical treatment in *Hospital* or psychiatric treatment in *Titicut Follies.*)
8. The hero seeks to protect society from the harmful acts of his complement. (In which case function 3 takes on added importance.)
9. The hero seeks to aid a complement in distress. (Function 3 may be a precondition or "a social actor in distress" may define a complement.)
10. Heroes or complements relax among themselves. (In Wiseman's films, though, they are always recognizable in terms of their roles; for example, we may see an Army recruit with his family but he is in uniform at a military base, not at home.)
11. Helpers (janitors, orderlies, receptionists, etc.) maintain the hero's institutional facilities.

These broadly defined functions may seem overly obvious, but sometimes a task of analysis is precisely to point out what may seem obvious. Very often it may be so taken for granted that we fail to see how to organize the obvious into categories that can relate it to the not-so-obvious. In the case of Wiseman's functions it is striking that so disparate a range of institutions and events can be reduced to so few functions. (We should bear in mind that Wiseman studies a particular aspect of institutions, though—their interface or boundary with society at large.)

It is also striking that even though some of the functions can be arranged into narrative sequences in which the middle term explains the difference or change between the first and last terms, this very seldom occurs in the actual arrangement of functions in Wiseman's films. Functions 4, 5, 6, for example, compose such a sequence but do not occur in that order at the level of either facets (sequences) or the whole. (*Basic Training* and *High School* display this arrangement to some degree at the level of the whole; the parts in each case, though, fail to chart a linear progression of intervening functions and instead favor variations on recurrent functions, as in the other films. As such, this gross arrangement is at best a very weak form of narrative.)

Another result of Wiseman's non-narrative organization of functions is the loss of certain predictive possibilities present in a narration chain of functions. Since the middle function explains the difference between initial and final states we can often predict the final state if we know the initial and middle functions (story tellers often play upon this predictive tendency in a variety of ways). Rather than an anticipatory relationship to the text, Wiseman's mosaic structure and the supplementary nature of the facets frequently demand a retroactive relationship to the text. On first encounter we have no way of even anticipating a sequence's duration (since the characters and functions it introduces bear no necessary relationship to the succeeding sequence). Sequences in *Hospital,* for example, may elaborate on function 9 over a considerable number of shots and minutes or may encompass the same, abbreviated function in one shot lasting a matter of

seconds. This kind of "play" within the text is integral to our reading of it and recalls the *Cahiers du Cinéma* editors' distinction between turning a film into a text readable a priori and making the reading itself participate in the film's process of becoming-a-text."[18] (This is exemplified in the detailed analysis which follows.)

> *. . . the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.*
>
> —Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*

The mosaic structure of Wiseman's films implies an attitude toward the institutions he studies, but due to the utilization of indirect address, this attitude is never explicit. Wiseman's films become unlabelled metaphors (lacking a word or figure for "like") rather than statements, as documentaries in direct address can be. As such his films challenge the convention of causal or deterministic explanation characteristic of narrative and direct-address commentary (which did not earn the name "voice-of-god" by accident). At this level Wiseman's films propose an epistemology with remarkable kinship to some of the premises of systems theory. The supplementary or associational nature of Wiseman's mosaic pattern stresses goal-seeking and constraints more than determinism and causality. A later event does not occur because of a previous event as it does in narrative; rather any event occurs because of the constraints imposed upon all events (within a given system—in Wiseman's case, the system governed by the institutional code): "In other words, a description of the possible behavior of the 'organism' 'in itself' is inadequate without a description of the constraints exerted on those possibilities by the 'environment.' . . . in this perspective it is not a question of 'why such-and-such happened' but a question of what constraints operated so that 'the same old thing' or 'anything at all' DIDN'T happen."[19] The most recurring constraints in Wiseman's films are those of institution and role, especially in terms of how they are manifest at the boundary between an institution and those with whom it interacts.

This is perhaps most evident in the translation processes that occur at the boundary. Messages from numerous codes are translated into the dominant code of the institution, a process which also involves repression. Everything that cannot be translated, even though it may be understood, is repressed. Agents of the institution cannot respond to untranslated material within the constraints of the institutional code. In this respect the facets of Wiseman's mosaics evoke the similarity of encounters, the characteristic profile of typical communication at the interface between an institution and those who encounter it. The power of the process of typification involved in institutions and roles is best demonstrated by recalling that many of these highly structured encounters occur between complete strangers who are nonetheless willing to play their parts before a camera.

Individual social actors, despite the prescriptions of their roles, do struggle to respond to messages they undestand on the level they are meant but they are constrained to respond in relation to the institutional code defining their roles. Significantly, even in the synchronic moment displayed by a Wiseman film, minor acts of subversion, little contestations, take place—exploiting "free play" within the presiding code. The psychiatrist in the scene analyzed below, for example, seeks to obtain welfare aid for his patient long after he is aware that the welfare system ("played" by Miss Hightower) cannot translate his message: his patient is technically ineligible. Likewise in an earlier scene Dr. Schwartz, the doctor described below who aids a fellow on a "bum trip," telephones another hospital to complain about their improper transfer of a patient. In *High School* a group of students clearly articulate their school's limitations ("morally, socially, this school is a garbage can") even though when lunch is over they slip back (or are slipped back) into the roles they criticize.

The dialectic of individual and institution suggested here is a long way from Durkheimian functionalism, or the kind of structural determinism evidenced, for example, in the work of Louis Althusser and some film theorists who have adopted his thought to the cinema. Only ongoing struggle can yield significant changes in institutional structure or social organization, but even Wiseman's synchronic studies posit a base for this process in their description of role-playing, ploy-

ing[20] or what are called, more politically, "resistance strategies," in Brecher and Costello's *Common Sense for Hard Times* (New York: Two Continents, 1976). Whether the resistance comes from hero (the psychiatrist and Dr. Schwartz in *Hospital,* for example) or complement (some of the students in *High School,* patients in *Titicut Follies,* and recruits in *Basic Training*) much of the subjective "bias" in Wiseman's style suggests Wiseman's own sympathy and support for those whose resistance provides an initiating moment for social change.

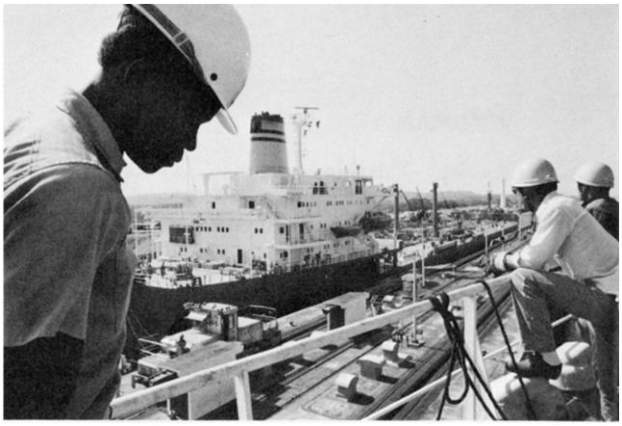
One of the things that intrigues me in all the films is how to make a more abstract, general statement about the issues, not through the use of a narrator, but through the relationship of events to each other through editing.

—Frederick Wiseman, interview

In order to examine the relationship of events to each other without recourse to direct-address commentary, Wiseman requires a site upon which to base his examination. This site is the diegetic plane of spatial and temporal unity. As in fiction it provides the arena in which agents carry out functions, albeit functions governed by an institutional code rather than a narrative one. The diegesis supports Wiseman's study not of individuals but of an ensemble of social relations.

As in classical narrative, the construction of the diegesis depends upon continuity editing. Such editing sutures the traces, the cuts or gaps, of its own production to conjure up a plausible but imaginary universe. Wiseman's formal organization relies heavily upon the ability to mask potentially huge gaps in the real time of the pro-filmic event within sequences. A good example is the scene with the psychiatrist in *Hospital* mentioned above. Donald E. McWilliams reports that the scene, uncut, lasted an hour and a half.[21] On screen it lasts approximately ten minutes and yet appears to cover virtually the entire encounter.

Achieving this effect requires the use of some of the tactics of *découpage* derived from classic continuity editing of the image track but without many of its resources: Wiseman never shoots with more than one camera, for example.[22] It also requires skillful manipulation of sound/image



Wiseman's newest film, CANAL ZONE

relationships. The narrative film-maker can plan his shots and their accompanying sound beforehand to yield a sense of continuity and realism but Wiseman has minimal control over what his social actors do. Continuity emerges *ex post facto*, as a function of editing. If Wiseman's strategies are at all instructive to political documentarists and theorists alike, as I believe they are, then it will be well worthwhile examining in detail how an imaginary continuity can be constructed in a situation where the film-maker controls the pro-filmic event so weakly.

This examination must focus on the joins or articulations between shots rather than between sequences. I propose to adopt several categories of spatial and temporal articulation involving the image and sound tracks. These derive from Noel Burch's categories in *Theory of Film Practice*, modified to accommodate *cinéma vérité* editing as well as classical narrative.

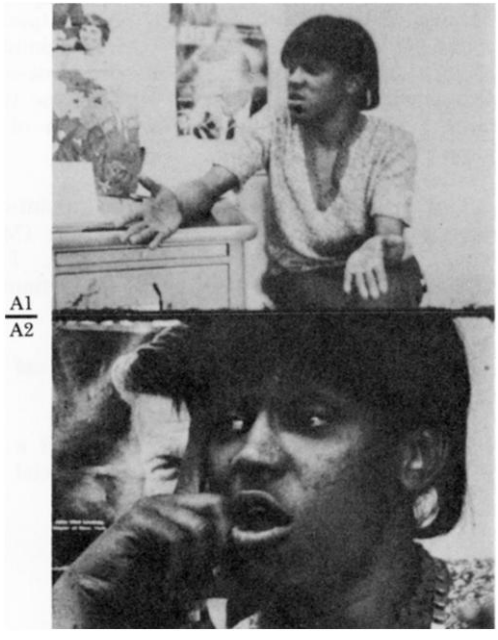
First, for the image track there are three kinds of spatial articulation. *Spatial continuity* involves overlapping visual fields: if a character reappears it must be against an overlapping background. *Spatial proximity* lacks overlap and is implied by various cues such as matching—reoccurring objects or characters across a cut in which no large spatial displacement has been otherwise suggested, or eyeline matching and its sub-category, the point-of-view figure. *Spatial discontinuity* occurs when there is no overlap and no cues to proximity. Reoccurrence of a character may not overcome discontinuity if movement is stated or implied.

We can also identify three kinds of temporal articulation for the image track. *Temporal continuity* is when action appears continuous across a cut. This depends upon such devices as match-

cuts (which are rare in Wiseman who cannot stage his shots to provide the desired overlap of actions), inserts and shot/reverse shot figures which usually depend upon continuous sound as a cue to temporal continuity. Point-of-view figures also imply temporal continuity in most cases. Deviance is possible, though, leading to indefinite ellipses generally rather than flashbacks specifically as Edward Brannigan suggests.[23] Secondly a *definite temporal ellipsis* indicates a precise, measurable time gap. Since there is no absolute scale of reference to the diegesis, a temporal baseline must be established before the cut (the velocity of someone walking, for example). This articulation, often dependent upon scripted shots, is rare in Wiseman. Finally, unmeasurable time gaps are indicated by *indefinite temporal ellipses.* If the ellipsis involves *abridgment* the temporal flow continues to originate from a previously established coordinate (the onset of an interview, for example). Gaps in Metz's "ordinary sequence" are of this kind. In Wiseman's films where match-cutting is difficult, such elisions often take the form of jump-cuts. If the elision involves a *shift* the temporal flow is reset to a new time scale. Such cuts often occur between sequences as a function of the mosaic structure in Wiseman. Also, deviant point-of-view shots may represent abridgments or shifts which can usually be determined only by a retroactive reading of the cut.

For the sound track it is more useful to analyze its relationship to articulations of the image track than to examine its own articulations which are, in fact, often impossible to determine from a film print. (Access to mixing sheets would generally be essential since there may be overlapping articulations of speech, music, and location sound.) Spatial articulations of the sound track play little role in Wiseman and have been deferred (although they are very significant in Robert Altman's films, a director with many striking similarities to Wiseman). Temporal relationships implied by the sound track at points of image track articulation are crucial, however, since they often resolve or determine how to read the articulation. In Wiseman's films these relationships normally involve the verbal sound track ("presence" or location sound is usually continuous throughout a scene and music absent). *Temporal continuity* involves speech continuing uninterrupted across a visual cut (a sound bridge). *Temporal proximity* involves speech before and after a visual cut which is closely related either logically or analogically (tone of voice, rhythm or loudness, for example). Slight logical or analogical shifts often serve as cues to temporal elision the magnitude of which is seldom discernible. *Temporal discontinuity* involves verbal statements bearing no clear relationship to each other. This relationship usually prevails between sequences.

In the analysis which follows, these categories are applied to a representative segment of *Hospital.* In overview, we are dealing with four units or facets which comprise a segment dealing with hospital/social deviant interactions ("deviant" strictly in a descriptive sense): A1-8,* B9-16 and C17—three syntagms that comprise an "ordinary sequence" about a psychiatrist/homosexual patient encounter; D1-4 about a hospital staff/alcoholic encounter; E1, a doctor/drug addict encounter; and F1-9, a doctor/drug-overdose-victim encounter. The letter and number designations indicate articulations; in the parentheses the running time of the second shot is given in minutes and seconds; and the conventional abbreviations of shot type help specify the kind of visual cut



A1
A2

*Capital letters designate syntagmas, numbers designate shots.

involved. Slash-marks indicate cuts. Some of the articulations which repeat previous strategies have been omitted.

A1/A2 (1:20). MS of patient named Mr. Vivas/ CU of Mr. Vivas.

Spatial continuity occurs because of overlap but the editing lacks match and appears as a jump cut. We must attend to the sound track to determine whether the articulation involves temporal continuity or proximity. In this case the last statement before the cut is:

Mr. Vivas, (before the cut, in shot A1)
There are things that are not normal and this is what I mean.

After the cut we hear:

Doctor (in shot A2)
I want to establish one thing with you.

No clear case for continuity exists but proximity and abridgment are indicated by the word logic of the cut: the doctor's statement appears to continue a line of thought established prior to the cut.

A2/A2a (:06). CU patient/CU doctor.

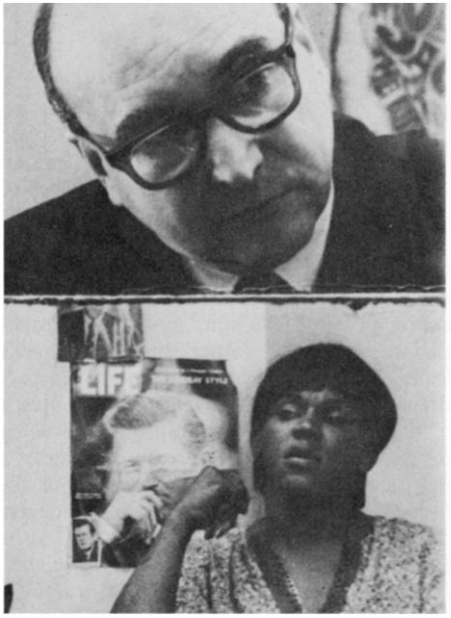
The new shot is read as an insert due to visual and aural cues. We hear the doctor begin to interrupt before we cut ("Mr. Vivas . . .") but the patient continues his previous line of thought as we cut to the doctor whose expression indicates a certain eagerness to speak. The insert also exhibits an eyeline match: Mr. Vivas on the right of the screen/the doctor looking screen right. Because Wiseman cuts from CU to CU spatial continuity is difficult to establish (there is minimal background and no overlap) but the close-ups also establish a graphic match between the two faces which helps reduce the impression of a jump cut.

A2a/A3 (:15). CU doctor/MS patient.

This articulation involves a normal point-of-view shot showing whom the doctor sees (Mr. Vivas) and implies temporal continuity. The sound track reinforces this sense of continuity by an articulation based on word logic:

Patient (before the cut, in shot A2a)
I would assure you that it would do me a heck of a lot of good

Patient (after the cut, A3)
. . . 'cause I'm having somewhat of a difficulty obtaining what is known as social service with, in other words, welfare.



A2a
A3

Between A2a and A3, however, there is a slight shift in Mr. Vivas's tone and rhythm. These analogical cues suggest that Wiseman may have omitted an indeterminate amount of dialogue and joined together two statements which still maintain a logical progression. The possibility of abridgment emerges but its actual presence or extent cannot be determined exactly. The image track articulation implies continuity. The sound track's word logic reinforces this implication even as it leaves cues to possible abridgment. The articulation's ultimate ambiguity is characteristic of Wiseman's films and of the *imaginary* continuity of the diegesis generally; it also clearly illustrates the central importance of sound/image relationships to Wiseman's editing style.

A5/A6 (:52). CU patient/CU patient.

Spatial continuity is implied by overlapping background and reappearance of the patient. The graphic match reduces the sense of a jump cut (as does Wiseman's long-take style). The sound track exhibits a slight pause and analog shift which could be a cue to abridgment although word logic gives a sense of a continuing line of thought (some degree of shift in logic and analog values is endemic to normal conversation, a quality Wiseman exploits to full advantage). The very fact that a cut occurs is perhaps the best, though still ambiguous, cue to abridgment since in terms of classical continuity editing it is unmotivated (showing the same character from approximately the same position—a 30° rule violation to boot):

Doctor (before the cut, in shot A5)
Because what?
Patient (before the cut)
Because I am a minor.
Patient (after the cut, in shot A6)
But you know, when I do go over to the welfare center they tell me, "And how have you been supporting yourself and eating and doing this and that?" And you know what I've been doing, prostituting . . .

A6
A7

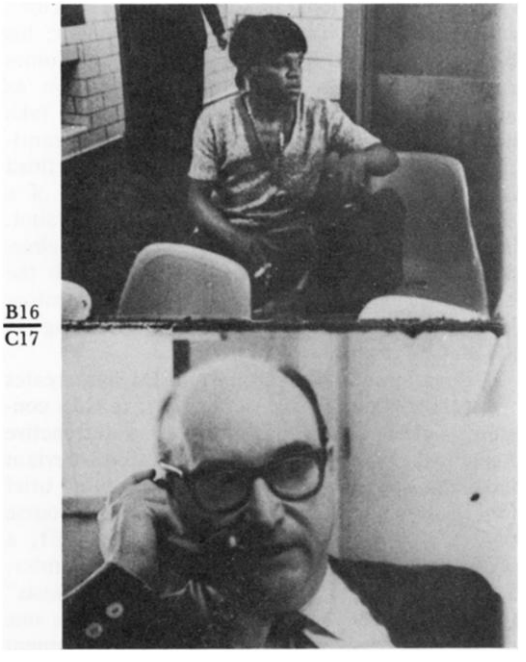
A6/A7 (:18). CU Mr. Vivas/MS doctor, over patient's shoulder.

Spatial continuity emerges from the match element, the reappearance of the patient. This is the first two-shot in the sequence (3:20 or so into the encounter) and allows for a retroactive placement of the two characters in relation to one another. A slight logical and analogical shift in the doctor's dialogue before and after the cut is a cue to abridgment but, as elsewhere, its very slightness encourages a reading of temporal continuity:

Patient (before the cut,A6)
I have told them about it.
Doctor (before the cut, A6)
Yeh, I know. Well don't tell them any more. I'll tell them to forget it.
Doctor (after the cut, A7)
When a person tries as hard as he can to do the best he can and it doesn't work he gets very upset and confused and he thinks to himself, I must be all mixed up, there must be something wrong with me, I must be bad even though I don't feel it.

A8/B9 (:10). CU Mr. Vivas/LS hospital corridor.

This articulation signals spatial discontinuity and a temporal shift. A new source of presence appears (general corridor noise and paging messages) and continues throughout B9-B16, which develops as a descriptive syntagma of hospital corridors and people sitting in waiting rooms. The film abandons the doctor and patient as we seek to establish new spatial and temporal coordinates.



B16
C17

B16/C17 (4:55). MS Mr. Vivas, sitting on a waiting room bench/CU doctor on the telephone.

B16 concludes the descriptive syntagma by returning to the previous patient, Mr. Vivas. This return invites a retrospective analysis of the syntagma (has this description of "waiting" in general actually been a description of Mr. Vivas's waiting?) and implies, though by no means guarantees, that the next sequence may be a very direct supplement to A1-8.

C17 returns to the psychiatrist who interviewed Mr. Vivas, confirming one of the possibilities opened by B16. (In Wiseman's overall pattern, not returning to the psychiatrist is also entirely possible.) Temporal continuity arises from a sound bridge between the shots (we hear the doctor begin a conversation with Miss Hightower, a welfare worker, before we cut away from Mr. Vivas to the doctor). C17 continues for nearly five minutes as the doctor tries to obtain assistance for Mr. Vivas. His last words: "I don't wish for you to tell me that you don't know what you're going to do . . . (looking up) She hung up on me."

During the telephone exchange the doctor's role subtly shifts from hero to complement: his function as agent of the hospital's code becomes subordinated to Miss Hightower's function as agent of the welfare code. Wiseman's long take provides a coherent diegetic base for this transition and also retrospectively stands as the third part of an "ordinary sequence" composed of a scene, descriptive syntagma and autonomous shot. The three together complete a fairly well-elaborated account of functions 3 and 9 in which the descriptive syntagma represents a preparatory interval between "diagnosis" and "seeking to aid a complement."

Discontinuity between C17 and D1 demarcates two facets although the viewer must remain constantly alert to the possibility of a retroactive fusion (that A-F all involve a hospital/deviant interface, for example). D1-4 is much more brief (1:45) and breaks off before any clear-cut course of action is pursued to aid the patient. E1, a 35-second autonomous shot of another encounter, follows and again breaks off before "diagnosis" seems complete. This lack of completion is one of the qualitites that allows facets to supplement one another and that demands active, and retroactive, engagement by the viewer.

The complete dialogue in shot E1:

Doctor (E1)

Do you drink? (patient mumbles, very garbled, slurred speech, inaudible)

Doctor

Do you inject the needle?

Patient (in wheelchair)

Yea . . .

Doctor

When did you inject? When did you inject? (pause) What, heroin?

Patient

(mumbles, inaudible)

Doctor

Well, you come over to the side, and I'll check . . .

(Doctor wheels patient out of frame)

E1/F1 (:47) MS hospital room where doctor and patient had been/MS Doctor (Dr. Schwartz) and patient in an emergency room.

This final sequence involves the administration of an emetic to a patient who has had a bum trip on a psychedelic drug. (F4 is a 2:15 shot of the patient vomiting profusely, as example of 'relentless empiricism" at its extreme.) Editing on word logic prevails throughout most of the scene and even introduces it. Dr. Schwartz seems to continue the same line of questioning pursued in E1 but in this case the patient responds far more articulately:

Doctor (beginning of F1)

What do you think they gave you? What did they give you?

Patient

They told me it was mescalin but I was chewing on it and it tasted sort of funny, like soap or something like that.

Doctor

Uh huh.

Patient

Shit.

Doctor

They told you it was mescalin but it tasted . . .

Patient

Yea, I know it was poison.

Doctor

Lie down.

Patient

OK, OK. I don't wanna die. I don't wanna die.

Doctor
You're not going to die . . .

F8/F9. MS patient in profile, camera pans to patient's vomit on the floor/CU patient in profile.

This articulation holds special interest as a deviant point-of-view figure. F8 concludes with a camera movement (pan) from the patient's face to what he sees. F9 returns to the patient, securing what Edward Brannigan calls a "closed point of view." Rather than guaranteeing simultaneity between shots, however, the articulation is a cue to abridgment. It lacks the guarantees found in narrative film such as an expressive reaction to what is seen or subsequent action that would imply simultaneity. Instead the sound track carries a verbal pause followed by a statement with logical and anological shifts from the previous statement:

Patient (before the cut, F8)
Anybody know how to sing or play music or something? I don't know. Oh shit.
Patient (after the cut, F9)
I think I should go back with my family.

The strong possibility of abridgment, an indefinite ellipsis, cannot be pinned down. We have no final recourse to an objective or absolute spatial and temporal scale. Continuity and its attendant realism is of an imaginary order and in Wiseman's films the impression of continuity emerges forcefully at the same time as the origins of this impression depends upon an active, and retroactive, reading of cues embedded in shots and their articulations.

A living language is a concrete fact—grammar is its abstract substratum. These substrata lie at the basis of a great many phenomena of life . . . —V. Propp

The time has come to redefine Wiseman's mosaic structure or abstract substratum a little more precisely by way of conclusion. If a narrative consists of a number of functions arranged in a fixed order, then Wiseman's mosaic favors repetition of a few functions at the expense of the many. It is as though he had removed them from their narrative linkage and then substituted, paradigmatically, different variations of the same function. These substitutions are displayed consecutively but do not constitute a narrative order. The textual system is metaphoric (poetic) more than metonymic (narrative or expository), and supplemental or associative more than strictly additive.

Sequences in a Wiseman film exhibit the diegetic characteristics of narrative sequences although the whole film is not a narrative. Nevertheless, it is still possible for the whole of a Wiseman film to have some characteristics of a narrative sequence. In fact, Wiseman's films, as wholes, or mosaics, are remarkably similar in organization to the narrative sequence type Metz calls a bracket syntagma: "A series of very brief scenes representing occurrences that the film gives as typical samples of a same order of reality, without in any way chronologically locating them in relation to each other. . . . None of these little scenes is treated with the full syntagmatic breadth it might have commanded, it is taken as an element in a system of allusions. . . ."[24] Even in the narrative context of his *grande syntagmatique*, Metz's description aptly conveys the poetic potential of this choice of sequence.

This form of overall organization is distinctly cinematic. It adopts the strategy of organizing the whole in terms of the characteristics of a cinematic part. As such it is akin to Godard's use of band construction (lateral tracking shots) in *Weekend* and *One Plus One.*[25] As a bracket syntagma Wiseman's mosaic also bears comparison with Michael Snow's use of the autonomous segment (long take)/zoom in *Wavelength* or long take/tracking shot in *Breakfast,* or Paul Sharits's use of the single frame in *Ray Gun Virus* as controlling cinematic structures for the whole. It is in this sense that Wiseman's concept of the whole places him in association with the experimental film-making tradition. His films provide a distinctive fusion of extra-cinematic codes (especially those of existing institutions) with cinematic codes (the mosaic or bracket syntagma structure to the whole).

Wiseman does not seem to have developed this fusion for overtly formal or political ends. Politically, Wiseman's choice of an "ensemble of social relations" is extremely narrow and fails to examine the larger ensemble circumscribing the boundary between institutions and the public or the characteristics of class struggle found at that

boundary itself. Nonetheless, his films' structure carries a set of theoretical and ideological implications with it. Among them, it seems to me, is the political challenge to gauge the significance of his focus upon constraints more than linear causality and the relationship of this focus to historical materialism, especially to the constraints of ideology upon social role-playing. His films also issue a challenge to examine some of the overly generalized and at least potentially elitist critiques of narrativity and realism that have recently emerged, especially in France and Britain. While not self-reflexive in a formalist or political (Brechtian) sense, Wiseman's films are not simple transparencies of a bourgeois world which we, as spectators, passively contemplate. They demand an active/retroactive way of seeing, and raise more questions about the political uses of narrative, documentary, and cinematic structure than they answer. Rather than reject Wiseman's work for its limitations, we can use his films as a springboard for rethinking some of the assumptions and assertions made in the name of political, direct-address documentaries on the one hand and formal, self-reflexive avant-garde films on the other, in order to advance the struggle towards a materialist cinema across as broad a front as possible.

NOTES

1. Other Wiseman films include: *The Cool World* (1963), producer, Shirley Clarke, director; *Essene* (1972) about a Benedictine monastery; *Meat* (1976) about a slaughter-house/packing plant and *Canal Zone* (1977). This paper is based upon an analysis of all Wiseman directed films except *Welfare, Primate, Meat,* and *Canal Zone.* Except for *Welfare,* which I have not seen, these other films seem to pose significantly different problems of analysis and may require different hypotheses about their structure.

2. Ideology is meant in the Althusserian sense of our imaginary relationship to the real conditions of existence, a notion elaborated in his essay "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

3. Actions and enigmas are the terms of Barthe's proairetic and hermeneutic codes in *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, (1974), pp. 18-19. Of the five codes he defines they are the only ones with enough specificity to be useful in a range of contexts, ironically enough. The others can be regrouped into more specific cinematic or extra-cinematic codes.

4. See my article "Documentary Theory and Practice," *Screen,* vol. 17, no. 4 (Winter 1976/77), pp 34-48.

5. Stephen Mamber, *Cinéma Vérité in America* (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1974), p. 4.

6. This argument is further elaborated in Eileen McGarry's "Documentary, Realism and Women's Cinema," *Women and Film,* vol. 2, no. 7 (Summer 1975), pp 50-58.

7. Barry Salt, "Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures," *Film Quarterly,* vol. 28, no. 1 (Fall 1974), p. 21.

8. See, for example, Peter Fischer, *Mosaic: History and Technique* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971).

9. Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society* (Berkeley, London, New York: University of California Press, 1975), p. 125.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

11. Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (New York: Oxford, 1974), pp 127-128.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

14. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin and New York: University of Texas, 1968), p. 21.

15. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), p. 68. This concept is discussed on several occasions in the selection of articles on "Form and Pattern in Anthropology."

16. See Stephen Heath, "Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Part II," *Screen,* vol. 16, no. 2 (Summer 1975), pp 102-106.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

18. The editors of Cahiers du Cinéma, "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln,*" *Screen,* vol. 13, no. 3, p. 14; reprinted in *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley, London, New York: University of California Press, 1976).

19. Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure* (London: Tavistock, 1972), p. 356.

20. The notion of role playing is best developed by Erving Goffman and ploying by Stephen Potter originally but applied to sociological theory by Peter L. Berger in *Invitation to Sociology* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), pp 131-134.

21. Donald E. McWilliams, "Frederick Wiseman," *Film Quarterly,* vol. 24, no. 1, p. 25.

22. Personal communication with Fred Wiseman, No. 4, 1977.

23. A comprehensive taxonomy of POV figures appears in Edward Brannigan's "Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View Shot," *Screen,* vol. 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975) pp 54-64.

24. Metz, *Film Language,* p. 126.

25. These Godardian strategies are discussed in detail in Brian Henderson's "Towards a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style," *Movies and Methods,* pp. 422-438.

WILLIAM MORITZ

Beyond "Abstract" Criticism

Five years ago in the pages of this journal I outlined the special need in the experimental film field for more carefully researched monographic studies like Louise O'Konor's superb *Viking Eggeling* (Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm 1971), and more philosophical-theoretical treatises which would definitively explore aesthetic-technological issues (as well as a comprehensive encyclopedia of film-makers and movements). The intervening years have brought little relief to this critical drought. Hans Scheugl's and Ernst Schmidt's two-volume *Eine Subgeschichte des Films, Lexicon des Avantgarde- Experimental- und Undergroundfilms* (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt, 1974) provided an excellent international encyclopedia (with, of course, dozens of minor errors and omissions that can be corrected in a second edition or an English translation), and Tony Reveaux's revision of Sheldon Renan's *Introduction to the American Underground Film* (scheduled for publication early next year) should go even further toward filling that gap. However, the other two areas remain largely void. My own monograph on Oskar Fischinger (*Film Culture* No. 58-59-60, 1974) was the only other substantial, quasi-definitive study of a single film-maker to be published. Two provincial studies of the American independent-experimental film appeared—P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film* (Oxford, 1974) and the American Federation of the Arts catalogue, *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema* (1976). Both repeat the deplored flaws of earlier mock-histories in their attempts to force the basically sprawling and intractable mass of films into a handful of ill-advised or ill-defined trends and movements at the expense of ignoring dozens of significant films and film-makers and dozens of international cross-influences. To this list could be added the 1976 catalogue of the *Centre national d'art et de culture Georges-Pompidou,* the new Paris museum of modern art; though titled *Une Histoire du Cinéma,* it is actually based, like Anthology Film Archives, on the physical possession of prints in the museum's collection, hardly an exhaustive historical criterion. As I pointed out before, it is too soon to write definitive retrospective histories about a film genre (or genres) 80% of whose practitioners are still alive and working. We first (still) need specific studies of specific film-makers and detailed, unprejudiced theoretical discussions of specific aesthetic and technological issues (the use of "found footage," loops, optical printing and composite imagery, camera movement, etc.).

The infantile, ailing state of criticism is compounded by an apathy or incompetence on the part of reviewers and film-makers who ought to challenge the current low level of work and demand something better. Sitney's *Visionary Film* is a major work, and, with its inclusion of many precious documents and many debatable contentions, is far from being worthless, but its primary value, as with any other work, lies in the degree to which its false assumptions are challenged, its theoretical weaknesses elaborated upon, its mistaken observations corrected, its limitations, omissions and suppressions attacked and repaired. But instead of this productive dialogue we have silence, or "reviews" such as Ken Kelman's embarrassing, shameful note on p. 336 of *Film Culture* No. 58-59-60 (for which Sitney is assistant editor) claiming that the book is perfect, exhaustive, beyond reproach, definitive, and "best of all" books of film criticism and aesthetics. In essence we have lapsed into a situation like the proverbial land of the blind where the one-eyed man is king. But are we a land of blind film-makers and critics?

All of this stands by way of general introduction to the review of two studies which deserve special attention—Malcolm LeGrice's *Abstract Film and Beyond* (Studio Vista/MIT, 1977) and Standish Lawder's *The Cubist Cinema* (New York University Press, 1975).

LeGrice's *Abstract Film and Beyond* masquerades as a detailed and specific study of a particular movement or genre, the "abstract" film,

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but its biased and shallow investigation of non-objective film serves primarily as a kind of scapegoat or straw-man for an equally biased and shallow exposition of material-formal work by some contemporary film-makers, mostly British and chief among them LeGrice himself. LeGrice's films are in fact quite interesting, and he is a fluent writer. However, the ideological flaws in *Abstract Film and Beyond* are manifest on every page, and the aggressive, prejudiced stance of the author makes them offensive.

There are few simple textual or stylistic errors and only about a dozen factual errors, of which I would gladly supply a complete list for those desiring a precise *corrigenda.* The major problem with LeGrice's text is ideational, for he has sidestepped any detailed discussion of the theoretical issues behind the two kinds of films he deals with, so that the sense of direction of his arguments is lost in a morass of what appear to be gross false assumptions and punitive dualities.

The basic schizophrenia of the book is physically visible: of its 160 pages, the first 85 are full of pictures of traditional "abstract" images (Kandinsky paintings, frames full of circles, triangles, Lissajous curves, etc.) with the exception of a nine-page stretch on Dziga-Vertov—which means that less than half is devoted to "non-objective" film. The second half of the book is suddenly full of images of nude men in front of screens, close-ups of faces, production stills, cameras and charts of editing patterns, trees and rooms and horses and drag queens—obviously a substantially different kind of material from Kandinsky and Fischinger and the Whitneys. Is there some hidden connection none the less? Perhaps, but LeGrice has certainly not delineated it.

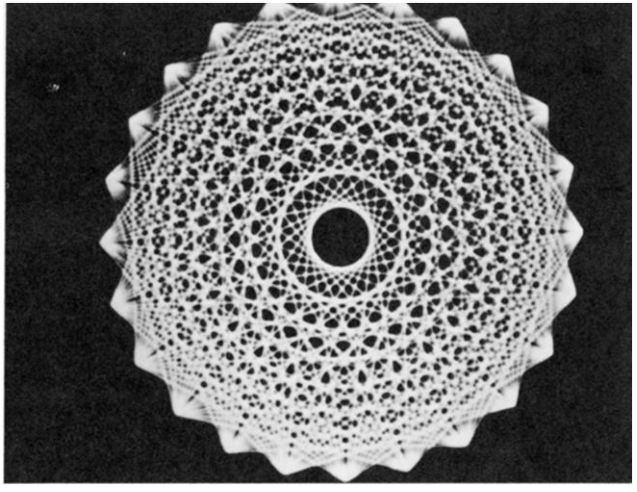
In the first place, LeGrice avoids dealing with what should have been a central concern of the book: what is "abstract" (or "absolute" or "concrete" or "non-objective" or "semi-abstract") art? Why would someone want to make a painting of circles, squares, and triangles? Is an "abstract" painting the same thing as an "abstract" film? What are the varying theoretical and aesthetic assumptions behind polymorphous and geometric abstraction? Are films like *Ballet Mécanique* that mix live-action and geometric imagery abstract? Is all non-objective art focused towards the same goals?

Instead of dealing with these basic issues, LeGrice gives us in his opening pages a synopsis of a beginning art-history text on modern painting—and a very conservative text at that, favoring a narrow "School of Paris" to the exclusion of all other trends and styles: Manet to Monet to Cézanne to Picasso to Duchamp, etc. Does this really help us to understand abstraction? Only vaguely. "Non-objective" abstraction—the type evolved and used by Kupka and Kandinsky, Eggeling and the Whitneys—is not quintessentially related to the School of Paris, and critics like Robert Rosenblum (*Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition,* Harper & Row, 1975) have established alternate "northern" lineages (Friedrich and Blake to Moreau and Millet to Van Gogh and Munch to Marc and Kandinsky or to Klee and Ernst or to Mondriaan and Rothko) which seem much more relevant to the non-objective film. The School of Paris tradition does, however, lead in one sense toward the structural-material film-making LeGrice favors in the second half of his book, but even there, he fails to establish a meaningful rapport between the two traditions, painting and film-making, which are, after all, quite different in terms of history, technique, and aesthetic potential. Unfortunately, LeGrice's failure to deal with these critical issues allows him to fall into the trap of accepting and propagating some of the more problematic and "trendy" hypotheses of current gallery-art critics, such as the assumption that art history has some manifest destiny or categorical imperative toward "progress" of which the goal is a "revolutionary" reduction of experience to the relative nothingness or tautology of definition of tools. Though LeGrice never states this in a detailed exposition, it flows as an ill-defined current through every page, where we are told that early films imitated "bourgeois" theater, that Man Ray's late films are "less radical and outside the scope of this book," that Eisenstein's films "regressed" until they were like "capitalist cinema," that the single-frame takes of Fischinger's "casual, personal diary" are not as good as similar recent films with a "serious formal base," that Len Lye's *Rainbow Dance* and *Trade Tattoo* are worth considering because they "prefigure" a "major direction," that Belson's films are "dangerously close to 'space fantasy'" while "the

language of the modern art tradition to which he relates" has since Hegel "banished transcendental concepts," that "formal cinema" is "aesthetically more advanced" than "abstract" cinema, that "new formal issues" emerged in 1966-1968, that Brakhage's *Art of Vision* "allows the audience to participate in the construction of relationships, rather than being restricted to an entirely passive response," that "the formal aspect of avant-garde film has exploded to become its mainstream," that "the narrative virtuosity" of *Wavelength* "confuses the advance of a material concept of cinema" thus "over-stretching the 'integrity' of the film," that "the innovations in film form outlined in this book represent the most important creative extension in the history of film thought" and that by counteracting "the reactionary catharsis" they represent "the most advanced and radical state of cinematic language."

These assumptions range from merely questionable to overtly non-sensical, and together they create a mousetrap of which LeGrice himself is the victim. While he adopts a radical, leftist political stance, we also learn that America is "the one western democracy which had finance enough to be really concerned about art." For all his talk of the "Politics of Perception," LeGrice never comes to terms with the fact that his formal cinema is a parasitical pastime of an intellectual elite in capitalist countries, nor with the fact that the concept of progress (and hence "advanced") and the narrow pseudo-scientific "common sense" perceptual model he embraces are immutably linked with capitalist/communist and fascist ideologies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

According to Les Levine (*Idea Art,* ed. Gregory Battcock, Dutton, New York, 1973, p. 196) only someone of *Time* magazine mentality still believes in the concept of "avant-garde." But LeGrice applies it with prejudiced, capricious vengeance. Scott Bartlett (who is hardly a major film-maker, and is being used as a scapegoat here) is castigated for using his "advanced plastic sensibility . . . to celebrate what is in effect an imperialist technology and political structure" and LeGrice warns "Technology is not apolitical!" But when he poses John Whitney as the most significant abstract film-maker (again a scapegoat action, since in the same page LeGrice can



LeGrice categorizes Jordan Belson's mature films as "illustrations of stellar and molecular phenomena," but scrutiny of a random frame from ALLURES *(1961) reveals configurations that defy this pigeon-hole.*

point out that Whitney doesn't really fulfill LeGrice's goals very well) LeGrice fails to criticize Whitney's use of computers (surely an imperialist technological instrument). And when Michael Snow (nostalgically? or pollutingly?) sets up his "complex mechanical tripod" in the wilderness for *La Région Centrale* or William Raban exploits "colour emulsion" with a "dense, neutral-toned filter," we hear no cries of "Imperialist Technology!" Above all, we are not given LeGrice's book free, but pay more than ten capitalist dollars for it to the M I T (Massive Imperialist Technology?) Press! Obviously LeGrice has inexplicable, newspeak standards that declare, "Advanced structuralist technology good; reactionary illusionist technology bad!"

LeGrice's blustering proscriptive assertions mask a real trouble in his ideological framework. His patronizing prejudice against non-objective film is obviously based on a superficial acquaintance with the genre. Significant non-objective film-makers like Dwinell Grant and Jules Engel (whose works bear the clearest links with Kandinsky and Duchamp) go unmentioned, while some of the very finest, most conscientious artists in this genre, like Robert Breer and James Whitney, are listed in such perfunctory fashion that one can gather no idea of the scope, quality or nature of their work. Perhaps they are lucky, however, for LeGrice treats those major figures of non-objective film-making whom he does discuss with such thorough-going condescension and insensitivity

that the results are usually insulting. When a pioneer exploits some device which younger film-makers imitate or re-create, LeGrice assumes that the older artist was unconscious of what he had done. (According to LeGrice, Len Lye "probably originated by accident" the carefully contrived and integrated image of the film-strip with sprocket holes in *Trade Tattoo*). Jordan Belson's enormous (for non-objective film-making) body of work is summarized in a few paragraphs that include basically inaccurate, superficial descriptions of the general style of the films, implying (evidently after a perfunctory viewing of two films, *World* and *Cosmos*) that Belson's films are mindless and limited pretty things, "illustrations of molecular and stellar phenomena" with "wistful" sound tracks that cause one to long for the purity of "interior states of consciousness in a Buddhist sense" and "an unattainable future." The contradiction in these terms (molecules and Buddhist consciousness and even the future are not unattainable) seems to have escaped LeGrice. If the films have the precision and grandeur of stellar and molecular events (which they do) might they not be formulated in some intelligent fashion?

LeGrice always assumes, and states explicitly in several cases, that the film is a tyrant and the viewer a helpless, indiscriminating victim of the "authority" of the film, but LeGrice's treatment of Belson, if nothing else, definitively refutes this assumption, since LeGrice himself obviously had no difficulty evading this "tyranny" in Belson's case; in fact, he evidently did not really see the films at all, or he might have wondered why Belson bothered to make a dozen films in a serial arrangement with the same morphemes occurring from film to film. Could LeGrice be somehow unable to abandon himself to the logic of films with a quintessentially cinematographic language, like Belson's? In any case, a supposed theory of abstract film which repudiates a major practitioner such as Belson must be like those quaint theories of dramatic unity that disqualify Shakespeare from being a great or acceptable dramatist—it leads to blind parochial restriction rather than enrichment. LeGrice fails to ask any questions that might have led him toward an understanding of the films. What is the significance of Belson's inclusion of modulated live-action footage? Why does Belson show "an increasing predilection for amorphous clouds of colour which swirl, fade and reform" (if that feeble and inadequate description can be seen as partly true)? Instead of answering things like that, LeGrice imposes an irrelevant eighteenth-century standard over Belson's work and then faults Belson for not living up to it. (LeGrice fails to note that most of the major abstract painters, from Kupka, Kandinsky and Mondriaan to Rothko and Newman, were inspired by transcendental ideas which in no way detract from, but rather enhance, their formal achievements.) To argue that Belson's films are "open to misinterpretation" is simply critically illiterate, comparable to claiming that any child could paint a Picasso or any monkey a Pollock. And, by the way, if you suspect that the subtleties of non-objective art might be too difficult to handle in writing, Paul Overy's *Kandinsky: The Language of the Eye* (Praeger, 1969) stands as a good example to the contrary.

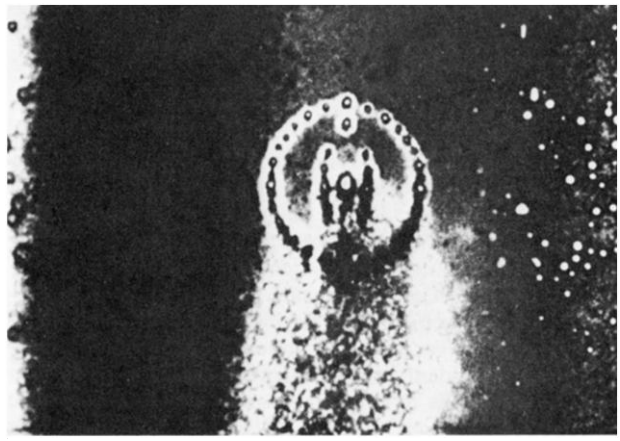
In some cases the flimsiness of LeGrice's treatment of films and film-makers may derive from the inaccessibility of prints for study—but if that is the case then it behooves a scholar to refrain from writing on a topic of which he has had inadequate knowledge and experience. Would an art critic write a book on Golden Age Dutch Painting when he had only seen first hand a couple of Rembrandts, a Ruisdael, a Hals, and a Saenredam? Or a literary critic write on "American fiction since Henry James" when she had only read *Portrait of a Lady* half a dozen years before and knew the other James novels only from plot summaries? Or a music critic write on the operas of Verdi and Wagner without ever having seen any operas staged? On the other hand, I know LeGrice has had access to some major films he treats shoddily or ignores. James Whitney's *Yantra* and *Lapis* have been on deposit with the London Filmmakers' Cooperative for nearly a decade, but *Yantra* is not mentioned at all and *Lapis* is cited in one sentence as "the most exciting" computer graphic film (a category to which it only vaguely belongs) at the same time LeGrice manages to write off the whole affair by suggesting that computers just naturally do things like that. As an artistic personality, James is dismissed in one sentence because his brother John is "the greater technical innovator." Is

"ABSTRACT" CRITICISM

LeGrice afraid that James's "greater" aesthetic innovations (and technical as well—solarization, step-printing, flickers, scrupulous limitation to dots, control of color in exhaustive durations, etc., all of which are focused toward a formal comprehension of the film material as a vehicle) challenge and co-opt LeGrice's own supposed innovations in the "new" formal cinema?

This accusation is not as gratuitous or spiteful as it might seem at first glance. LeGrice's whole text is written from an enormously biased point of view, favoring contemporary European film-makers, aggressively and repeatedly claiming superior status, precedence, advancement, etc. for himself and his compatriots. Granted, most published criticism of experimental film since 1940 is focused toward US film-makers, but that is no excuse to petulantly denigrate or ignore genuine achievements; rather one should simply offer (with perhaps a comparative preface) the additional neglected material, which should stand and "conquer" on its own merits—LeGrice should have written a book called *British Formal Cinema, 1966-Present.*

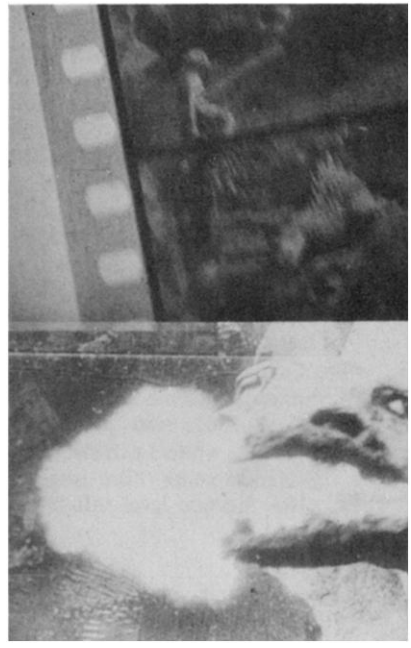
LeGrice's continuous stress on evaluative labels ("greater," "mainstream," "new," "advanced," "important," "significant," "innovative," etc.) is as critically immature as is his continual insistence on labeling things "first" (often incorrectly). Though he admirably avoids ranking Eggeling, Ruttmann, Richter, and Fischinger as the "first" abstract film-maker, but instead recommends scrutiny and evaluation of their films objectively, still he tells us that *Ballet Mécanique* was the first film to use black footage (which at least *Retour à la Raison* did prior), that *Ballet Mécanique* was the first film to use loops (when loops had appeared in earlier non-objective films and theatrical cartoons, and even occasionally in live-action comedies where blows and chases are rendered more comic by repetition), that Richter was the first to use negative footage (when at least Man Ray preceded him), that *Berlin* had the first "cross-sectional structure" (what about Cavalcanti's *Rien que les Heures*?), that *Man with a Movie Camera* was "the first film which clearly defines the camera as a participant in what it sees." Aside from what LeGrice dismisses as an "accidental" reference in *Ballet Mécanique,* Guido Seeber's 1925 *Ki-Pho* is entirely concerned



LeGrice never mentions James Whitney's pioneer YANTRA *(1950-55) in which hand-processed solarization and step-printing create textures and movements (the fluctuating "comet-tail" here uniquely cinematic in origin and function.*

with the film-making process, and Man Ray's 1926 *Emak Bakia* uses the camera and eyes as its central imagery. Indeed Seeber's *Ki-Pho,* a major source for formal, reflexive issues, is not mentioned at all by LeGrice. Is he afraid that a still of Seeber's film strip being pulled through the gate in 1925 might diminish the originality of his own *Little Dog for Roger* (1967-8)?

The general meaninglessness of this listing of "firsts" is exacerbated by the theoretical shallowness of the treatment of the aesthetic issues involved. What is the meaning (or meanings) of black film? of loops? of sprocket holes? of images



In the opening sequence of Seeber's KI-PHO *(1925), a mock roll-up title crawls faster and faster until it blurs, then the film strip seems to pull loose, exposing the sprocket holes and fluttering through the gate until it is "fixed" into the steady image of a dragon ("found footage" from Lang's* SIEGFRIED).

and cameras? What is the difference between animators like McKay and Fleischer who define themselves and the animation process as part of their "reflexive" films and Dziga Vertov's defining documentary live-action photography and process? LeGrice either side-steps the issue by assuming the effects were accidental (he thinks Murphy and Léger may have photographed their camera by accident!) or by suggesting one simple meaning that fails to engage with multiple other aesthetic implications. LeGrice tells us "the fixed camera and fixed frame are rightly understood in terms of concentrating attention—the fixed stare (a critical observation first made by Peter Gidal in 1971)." Is anything "rightly understood," and if so, who is the arbiter? LeGrice tells us that *Ballet Mécanique*'s loop is an "application of machine 'rotation' to the human movement" which is "prophetic" of "Warhol's multiple repeat paintings" (is he truly ignorant of the principles of serial art?). Just to note as LeGrice does, that long loops are different from short loops, or freeze frames different from re-filmed stop-frames, is not enough, since one may well question how and why these things differ.

The difficulty with LeGrice's European bias lies not even so much in the absurdity of lists like that of five "significant" Americans, two "significant" Canadians, ten "significant" Europeans—as in his genuine ignorance of much interesting "American," Canadian, and European film-making. British film-makers are discussed as of 1974 (the probable date of the book's composition) but most Americans are discussed as of ca. 1968-70. For example, Pat O'Neill, whose body of work challenges most of LeGrice's assumptions about the formal cinema, is belabored for his first film *By the Sea* (1963), the only one of his films discussed in any detail. LeGrice says O'Neill made only one abstract film, *7362* (1966-7), but O'Neill's *Screen* (1969) was shown at Edinburgh at the same time as *By the Sea* in 1969; *Screen* was shown several other times, including the Hamburger Filmschau, 1972, where LeGrice also had a show. David Curtis's *Experimental Cinema* (1971) manages to discuss in some detail not only *By the Sea, Bump City, 7362,* and *Screen,* but also *Runs Good* (1970), while LeGrice, six years later, can only refer to some "film fragments (untitled, 1972)." Now on one level this is all right, because independent film-making and criticism is (or should be) above all non-competitive (competition is a "bourgeois," "capitalist" concept). But LeGrice himself establishes the competition, and then uses the suppression of whole styles, generations, and schools of film-making to mask weaknesses in his assertions and assumptions.

LeGrice repeatedly insists (without support) that the "formal cinema"—a material, reflexive film—is more "advanced," "innovative," and significant than any other mode of film but this remains problematic. Though I can not resolve the issues here (it would take a book the size of LeGrice's to discuss them adequately—which is what *he* should have done), I would like to suggest a number of areas or issues that cry out for clarification and discussion.

The material-reflexive-formal mode is certainly not new or innovative as far as the general history of art is concerned. It is at least as old as the mirrors of Van Eyck and Velasquez, the half-cut marble figures of Michelangelo, the impastos of Rembrandt or the quick-sketch gestures of Hals. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, it has been a major preoccupation of the School of Paris, and one can easily see an obvious trend (traced by LeGrice himself) toward refining, enlarging, and reducing aspects of this material formalism from Monet to Cézanne to Picasso to Duchamp. This reductionism has gone so far that one could almost say (and "history" may definitively see in retrospect) that everything along this line was already done in painting by about 1920, and the work of many younger artists might be considered as re-plays, imitations, "school of," etc. This very real fear has caused art critics to write incessantly about why Ad Reinhardt's "black on black" is different from Malevich's "white on white," Johns's serial sequences from Monet's, Warhol's pop imagery from Gerald Murphy's, etc., etc. Though these had been abandoned as valid criteria for literary criticism, "movement" and "intention" have played a large role in this criticism, rather unfairly assuming (as LeGrice in turn does) that earlier less-well-documented artists were only vaguely conscious of issues and devices in their work that later artists could self-consciously proclaim in manifestos and interviews by knowledgeable critics (who often have a personal financial stake in the outcome of the artist's reputation).

By the mid-sixties, the speciousness or tenuousness of many of these arguments/criticisms created a mass panic in the art world which caused artists and critics alike to flee toward performance, poetry, music, film, and other media which were not "in trouble." Now the problems of reductionism and exhaustion in the 100-year-old painting tradition are hardly relevant to film, which in its literal infancy is already technologically outmoded (as the painting vehicle is not really), aesthetically under-explored, and socially (or functionally) quite different from painting anyway. There is no reason independent film-making should assume the burdens, the imperatives, or the suicidal trends of the current world of painting.

Material formalism and reductionism seem a form of death consciousness—a preparation of tomb artifacts with more and more specific instructions on how to revive and re-create the phenomena of a vanished everyday life. [N.B., these are still suggestions for discussion, not definitive judgments]. Aside from that little *frisson* akin to *déjà vu* (a form of identification?), what has a reflexive work to offer? If Giotto had confined his imagery to reflexive studies of fresco technique or the Limbourg brothers had filled their *Très Riches Heures* exclusively with references to book illumination, I doubt that we would remember them today, and indeed no more than a handful of their contemporaries—fellow professionals—would have understood them then (and the Duc de Berry and the Scrovegnis would hardly have paid for their *Très Riches Heures* or their chapel in the first place). Should we construct films like Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer* which are off-on codes that can be reproduced from a notated score long after the film vehicle has vanished, or should we try to express some content that may be of such interest that people will treasure and preserve our artifacts for many years?

Who is our audience? For LeGrice that seems to remain another unresolved issue. He frequently states (or implies) that the film viewer is basically an ignorant, experientially deprived victim of the film. According to LeGrice, films with illusions or dynamics exert an authority tantamount to tyranny over the spectator, who is unable to watch with a discriminating, selective eye unless, as in Brakhage's *Art of Vision*, everything is spelled out for him in 4-1/2 hours of pre-announced, preformulated, pre-digested permutations. The fixed stare and duration, for example, are only able to be sensed when monumental and monolithic works are entirely devoted to them—for apparently LeGrice's viewer is not acute enough to be sensitive to or conscious of his eye movements or the tension between "real" and "posited" time unless he is lectured and bludgeoned over the head with the issue. But who actually comprises the audience for LeGrice's films? Are they the Everyman of the general public? Certainly not, for "average" viewers would hardly be interested in the intricacies and refinements of film technology in and of themselves—they pay their dollars and pounds for amusement and fictional images of themselves and their problems, not for four-hour didactic lessons in eye movement and editing, which they assume are the film-maker's problems. Independent film-making is a cult pursuit patronized heavily by the film-makers themselves and supported by generous funding from governments, museums, and educational institutions in most cases. Do audiences of other film-makers need to be taught about camera mechanisms and projector beams and perceptual rhythms? And as to that part of the audience composed of non-film-makers, people who respect cinema as an art form, how many times must they learn about perceptual rhythms and camera mechanisms? Might they not already be aware of, say, eye movement and duration from the meditational observation of oriental landscape paintings and rock gardens? Might they not watch Belson's *Allures* and other non-objective films containing centric imagery, flickers, and after-images with the fixed stare these films demand? If a concentrated and extended discourse on a certain perceptual mode or a technique proves self-evident, boring, alienating, or redundant, has it been effectively advanced and innovative? Might not the discovery of similar information embedded in a larger, engaging context be more significant, more impressive to the viewer? Instead of dismissing Bruce Conner's use of loops in *Report* as "not part of the development of loop or repetition as a central basis of form" (and if it is not that, what is it?), perhaps LeGrice should ponder the fact that perception and com-

prehension of the loop form can be enhanced when it is an overt part of a highly charged context (as in the overt black spaces in *New York Near Sleep for Saskia, 5:10 to Dreamland* and *Sidewinder's Delta,* the blank screen in Lawder's *Catfilm for Katie and Cynnie,* the hair in the gate of my own *Gertrude Stein Film,* the flickers in *Report* and *Yantra,* etc. etc.)?

Again, these are questions and unresolved issues, not necessarily answers. Remember, I myself am a film-maker who has done reflexive multi-projector performance work, and I have seen my own (as well as LeGrice's and others') audiences flee from perceptual "lessons." These questions I pose are ones every independent film-maker and critic must wrestle with. From my own experience, I see two or three specific avenues that pass through these issues and may provide some access to a solution.

I tend to think of most film experiences in terms of a kind of yin-yang spectrum. Film gestures or events (which have their effect primarily as performance or political [in the sense of the politics of perception] ideas, with a temporal or temporary value) occupy the yang pole and film representations (which have an elaborate internal information that bears repeated watching) occupy the yin pole. Around the circle (or sphere) we have a whole range of in-betweens and strange bed-fellows, since, for example, Warhol's *Empire,* Annabel Nicolson's *Reel Time* and a Single Wing Turquoise Bird light show approach each other in position (from opposing directions) since each survives essentially as an idea that can not or should not be repeated as an act (the "can" and the "should" help to delimit their territories). The meaning of Warhol's early films was primarily as art-political protest (rather like Duchamp's urinal) so now that the point has been made and digested, we need not see the films again, indeed *can* not see the films again in the same way. This is why Duchamp's bottlerack is now mentioned as being a beautiful sculpture—and Warhol has wisely withdrawn his films from circulation. Most material-formal performances have the same political value, and should be repeated only where and when the political protest needs to be registered. LeGrice seems to be nervous about originality and precedence in this kind of film (e.g., Taka made "experiments" in 1969, but LeGrice "independently" made *Spot the Microdot* in 1970) but that is and should be irrelevant to political performances since basically material-formal-reflexive work is easy, and anyone can and should do the same gestures over again in every new place and time where they are "politically" needed—the courage of performance is laudable here, though "originality" was established by Duchamp (or at least Nam June Paik).

On the yin pole, we must come to terms with illusion and representation. All perception is a systematizing of illusion. Manipulating illusion is cinema's chief asset, and in fact *raison d'être.* Is illusion basically "bad"? LeGrice suggests so in many places. But is there a difference between the illusion of color in a black-and-white flicker film (which seems to be fine with LeGrice because it's pure perception) and the illusion of color in the flickers contained within Belson's *Allures,* a complete context that deals with several perceptual illusions (after-images, negative space, etc.), which *may* be interpreted as metaphors for the relativity of perception or consciousness in general? Is there something superior about LeGrice's illusion-representation of a fluttering film-strip in *Little Dog for Roger* to Belson's illusion of "amorphous clouds of colour" which are not actually representations of anything? LeGrice apparently thinks so because he conceives of his work as being reflexive, and thus primary in perception of the film object or film fact itself (i.e., a "scientific" investigation) while Belson seems "referential" to him. But I suspect he is diametrically wrong, for LeGrice has surrendered to a fascist-Hegelian-"scientific" model of perception and represents cinema technique itself as a pictured object, while Belson, following more complex models of perception, knowing all consciousness is relative and changeable, uses film as a vehicle for producing imagery that (despite occasional resemblances to "molecular and stellar phenomena") could not and does not "exist" in any other "reality" or medium we know except film—and Belson offers his films free from proscriptive verbal technical or critical apparatus, as pure experiences to be perceived and analyzed *visually* again and again (perhaps differently each time) by the viewer.

Is representation wrong at all? Certainly not. LeGrice carries on an ill-defined vendetta against

"literary" influence on film. Illusion, representation and narrative are not necessarily literary, but verbal criticism and manifestos usually are. Narrative features are no enemy of independent short films, just as the novel and stage plays are no enemy or rival of lyric poetry. Literary narrative films and "stagey" films have always been (and may always be) produced, but they are simply poor efforts. Almost from the beginning of film history, genuinely and uniquely cinematic narrative has developed with special tools (Méliès's trick vanishing, dissolves, speed variations, and split-screen composites; Gance's mirror distortions and multiple projections; Griffith's masks and tints and editing rhythms; Sennett's surrealistic, impossible chases, etc.) born of film technology. Cinematic narrative has a long, fine tradition of experimentation flowering today in the hands of film-makers like Alain Resnais, Vera Chytilova, Nicholas Roeg, Michael Snow, Yvonne Rainer, and James Benning. Narrative is not more or less innovative or compromised or reactionary than the simple lyricism, severe abstraction or purely perceptual exercises of Independent, Experimental, Underground, "avant-garde" shorts (and "longs"). They are different modes with separate and non-competitive identities. Ironically, some of the films LeGrice describes, which would be unintelligible without a sizeable written critical apparatus to support them, seem most literary and most compromised to me. The verbal and visual functions of the brain are carried on in separate lobes, and to some extent these functions are antithetical—though the Great Work manages to make brilliant use of both modes. If the content of a film is not fully expressed in a visual mode, the film may be unsuccessful. If the visual experience of a film is not intriguing and engaging (i.e., if it does not involve the viewer in *visual* thought and *visual* emotion) the viewer may remain unsatisfied, unimpressed, and unenlightened. LeGrice rarely faces these aesthetic issues in an experiential visual sense, relying instead on lists of verbal intentions and verbal similarities. LeGrice faults O'Neill's *By the Sea* because the hi-con printing is "not explicitly intended as content." (Nonsense! How does LeGrice know what O'Neill intended? Would that be relevant anyway? Serious criticism has long abandoned "The Intentional Fallacy.") He links it with Drummond's *Shower Proof* which LeGrice contends is superior because each stage of the printing process is visible; but does either film provide an interesting or satisfactory experience visually? What is it like to watch them? One could not tell from LeGrice's text. Even though a "new direction first emerged clearly" in Gidal's *Movie No. 1* (1972), would anyone want to watch a film in which "a narrator blandly describes the correlation between film exposure, the rate of motion within the image and the camera's running speed. This is visually demonstrated in two situations, one with a static camera and a hand switching a table light repeatedly on and off, the second with a hand-held camera viewing a photograph on a wall"? The qualities and textures of primary visual phenomena must be observed, discussed and evaluated, in representational as well as non-objective films. Not every film with centric circular imagery is similar in construction, function, or effect. The business of the critic is to scrutinize the primary phenomenon and describe and discuss it thoroughly. Even as Freud observed that sometimes a cigar is a phallic symbol and sometimes just a good smoke, so the critic must note that sometimes "less is more," sometimes "more is less," and sometimes "less is less." By trying to exploit the non-objective film (which is relatively popular, but which LeGrice basically dislikes) in order to gain publishing support for or to direct attention towards his own and friends' work (which is quite different from non-objective film, and much less popular), LeGrice has done a disservice to both worlds, covering each with less than half the detail it demands.

Fortunately, much less needs to be said about Standish Lawder's *Cubist Cinema,* since the book received a full, descriptive review in a previous issue of *Film Quarterly.* I would merely like to point out some serious flaws in the scholarship of the book for the benefit of those who might be tempted to cite or depend on Lawder's commentary as definitive.

The main focus of the book, the study of *Ballet Mécanique,* is shoddily founded on unauthenticated texts. At least four different primary prints of the Murphy-Léger film survive, each with its own particular characteristics—and aesthetic dynamics!—and its own pedigree: one 35mm nitrate in the Cinémathèque Française presum-

ably derives from early French cinéclub screenings, and a generally similar but not identical 16mm in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, with all the purely geometric figures tinted by hand, supposedly was given to the museum by Léger in the late thirties; a quite different 35mm nitrate in the Nederlands Filmmuseum (with copies at the British Film Institute and elsewhere), presumably deriving from screenings ca. 1930 at the Uitkijk Theatre in Amsterdam, contains still shots of Léger's paintings at intervals throughout the print (not spliced in, but printed in!) and another 35mm nitrate without paintings but with a similar alternate editing pattern, deriving from Kiesler's Viennese premiere in 1924, is now in Anthology Film Archives in New York. There may be others, and one of these might be somehow less authentic; I don't know because I haven't thoroughly researched the subject, but Lawder should have. He bases his whole discussion on a 16mm Museum of Modern Art rental print. I mentioned the Dutch version to Lawder in 1973, and he said he was not aware of it and it would be too hard to add in at that time.

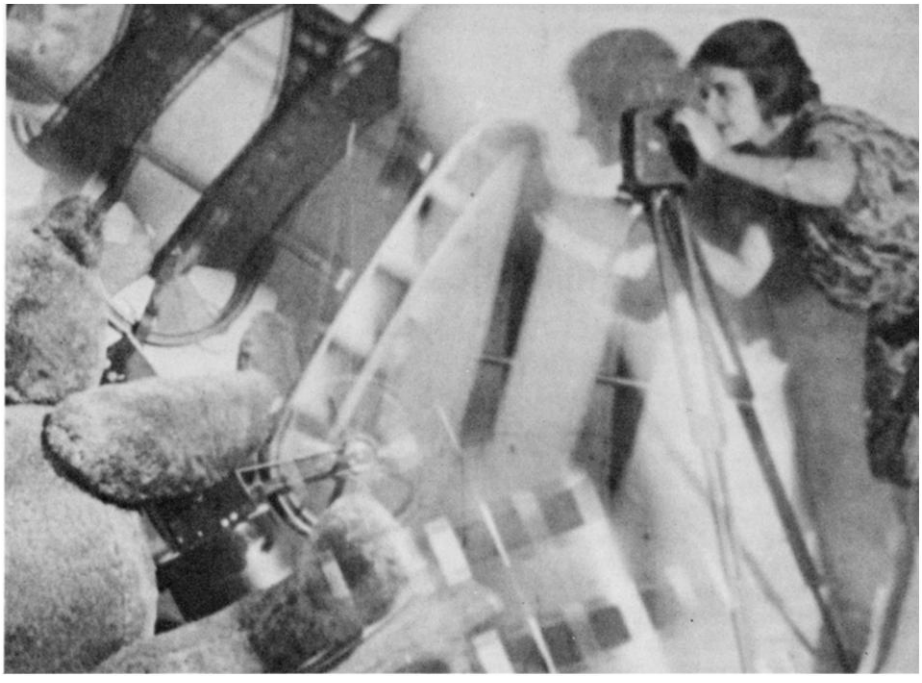
Another trouble in the book is Lawder's linguistic ineptitude in handling the translating of crucial, equivocal notes. According to Lawder, Léger complained about Gance's *La Roue: "This mechanical element* appears as the blows of projectors in a terrible, agonizingly long drama of relentless realism." We might well ask, What does this mean? The French sentence reads: *"Cet élément mécanique* que l'on voit disparaître à regret, que l'on attend avec impatience, est discret; il apparaît comme des coups de projecteurs dans un drame énorme, long, angoissant, d'un réalisme sans concession aucune."

This might be translated: *"This element of machinery* that one regretfully sees disappear, that one impatiently awaits, is reserved [or held back and quite separate]; it appears like "blinks" [flashes] in an enormous, long [tedious], agonizing [distressing] drama [stage-play] of Realism without any concession [that allows no interruption]." *Mécanique* has none of the English connotations (habitual, lifeless, unspontaneous) of "mechanical" for Léger; *coups des projecteurs* is a play on the common French phrase *coup d'oeil* meaning "blink" or "glance" (and other common phrases in which *coup* stands for "instant" rather than "blow") and since *projecteur* commonly means "spotlight" as well as "projector," perhaps the metaphor of the stage-play (*drame*) is being extended, and "flashes of spotlights" is implied; *Réalisme* undoubtedly had the literary connotations of Balzac and Zola for Léger rather than "photographic accuracy," etc. Lawder's unmarked abridgement, inaccurate translation, and lack of annotation deform the sense of the original.

Despite the fact that Louise O'Konor published a summary of her Eggeling researches in *Cinema Studies* in 1966, corresponded with Lawder directly, and published her full-length study of Eggeling in 1971, Lawder in 1975 continues to repeat inaccurate information about the dates of *Horizontal-Vertical Orchestra* and *Diagonal Symphony.* While Lawder's personal involvement with the Richter family might understandably have caused him to be cautious in his declarations, he could have discreetly revised his dates and references to Behne's review of *Horizontal-Vertical Orchestra* (rather than *Diagonal Symphony,* as Lawder states, p. 55).

Lawder offers some outrageous assumptions about how certain filmic effects were obtained. He claims that "apparently" Ruttmann's "designs were painted on sheets of glass, then distorted and made to move by mirrors." A glance at Ruttmann's surviving films shows no evidence of use of distortions or mirrors (which would be very limited indeed as an animation device). Lawder also claims that Léger [for practical and glamorous purposes, Murphy has been all but jettisoned] "by holding a prism over the lens" created the triangular "fracturing" of the image, which seems rather to be created by a kaleidoscopic arrangement of mirrors (despite Man Ray's testimony that Murphy owned distorting lenses).

Lawder devotes precious little space to sensitive and comprehensive analysis (as opposed to description) of *Ballet Mécanique,* and there are many more implications to images than the one-line epithets he tends to give them; thus he describes the recurrent shot of Kiki's mouth smiling only as "lovely" whereas it might as well be seen as grotesque and clownish, depersonalized by the masking that isolates it from the rest of the face, just another muscle action, a parody of the *viewer's* reaction to the washerwoman or habitual "emotion" and "response" in general,



Complex camera mattes (not prisms as Lawder suggests) create composite "cubist" imagery in Seeber's KI-PHO *(1925), a celebration of the film-making process.*

etc. Lawder labels Katherine Murphy's "final" [in this print only] appearance merely as "incongruous," but it seems rather to be a satiric comment on conventional catharsis and emotion, and a cliché rendered "visible" by being placed in a radical visual context (cf. Gertrude Stein's revitalization of "sense" through "Cubist" permutations and repetitions that seem "non-sense").

Finally, since *Ballet Mécanique* is one of the most important works in film history, its antecedents and followers, implications and innovations deserve better coverage. Rather than the work of Eggeling, Ruttmann, and Richter (which Murphy and Léger were probably ignorant of) Man Ray's *Le Retour à la Raison,* Henri Chomette's *Jeux des Reflets et de la Vitesse* and Clair's *Entr'acte* (which were contemporary and compatriot with the Murphy-Léger work) should have been discussed. The followers of *Ballet Mécanique* are legion, ranging from Richter and Deslaw to the whole spectrum of contemporary formalist film-makers—which demands discussions of loop theory, "abstraction", etc. But among the possible imitators, the least likely are Germaine Dulac and Guido Seeber. The serene, organic rhythms of Dulac's Impressionist *Thèmes et Variations* could not be farther away from the energetic dynamics of the Murphy-Léger film. Almost everything Lawder says about Seeber's *Ki-Pho* is incorrect; I almost doubt he has seen the film, and suspect he was working from the ad (reproduced on p. 179) which contains some "publicity stills" not derived directly from the film, but treated by Lawder as if they were. *Ki-Pho* is an inventive film, no less important than *Ballet Mécanique,* for Seeber uses "found footage," complex camera mattes (not prisms!) to create composite imagery, and the overt reflexive device of making the camera, film strip, and film-making process itself the central subject of the film. Lawder's insensitivity to these issues is astonishing.

To close on a happier note, I would point out that three new anthologies have appeared—Peter Gidal's *Structural Film Anthology* (1976, British Film Institute, 81 Dean Street, London W1V 6AA), Birgit Hein and Wulf Herzogenrath's *Film als Film, 1910 bis Heute* (1977, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Köln 1, Josef-Haubrich-Hof 1, West Germany), and Robert Russett and Cecile Starr's *Experimental Animation* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976)—which merit a close and detailed discussion; however, it can be stated simply that, despite some short-comings, all three contain numerous documents and provocative critical articles by several hands, which make them worthy of close attention and purchase.

Reviews

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER

Director: John Badham. Script: Norman Wexler, based on a story by Nik Cohn. Photography: Ralf D. Bode. Paramount.

John Badham's *Saturday Night Fever* represents the best and the worst aspects of the commercial Hollywood movie. The best is embodied in John Travolta and the stylized sensuality he expresses in the dance sequences. They explode with an energy that is skillfully channelled by the well-paced direction, camerawork, cutting, and choreography into a highly charged cinematic experience. These qualities mark even the trailer where Tony (John Travolta), in a bright red shirt, tight pants, and leather jacket, moves sensuously down the street to an inner rhythm that dominates the sound track and encounters a foxy girl bopping along in the other direction. They both turn around without saying a word, breaking their stride, or missing the beat, as if acknowledging that they belong to the same rhythmic species. Tony is not merely the best dancer in the neighborhood, he knows how to move with style—whether walking down the street, mixing paint, handling a ladder, or looking in a mirror. Like Fred Astaire, a genius of dance, he can turn the simplest gesture into a stylized line that is fascinating to watch. Of course, he's not really a great dancer like Astaire, but he is getting at a similar thing within his own disco genre.

Although Astaire uses this quality to express his personal uniqueness, this kind of stylized movement is frequently identified with certain racial groups, particularly blacks. As the noted jazz critic Stanley Crouch has said about the black aesthetic, you can find this "polyrhythmic plasticity" not only on the dance floor, but on the jazz stand, the basketball court, the football field, in the boxing ring, on the street, and in bed. This last comparison is made explicit in *Saturday Night Fever* by a number of eager curious women, who ask Tony whether he can make love as well as he can dance. Although this question is never really answered within the film, we do see that his "style" pervades his whole life and is his primary means of expressing his personal power. Travolta's stylization is a lot more explicitly sexual than Astaire's, which may be related to Tony's ethnic identity. This issue is raised even in some Astaire movies. For example, in the famous carioca sequence in *Flying Down to Rio,* the sexual explicitness of the dancing is directly correlated with the color of the dancers—moving from the hot sensuality of the blacks, through the choreographed eroticism of the browns, to the subdued stylization of the white aesthetic performed by Rogers and Astaire.

Saturday Night Fever explicitly acknowledges the racial dimension, yet hedges on its meaning. Not only does the dance contest open with a magnificent acrobatic performance by a black couple (who don't even "place" in the competition), but even Tony, the winner, acknowledges that the best dancers are really the extravagant, fiery Puerto Ricans; the dancing of Tony (who is dressed in a shiny white suit) and his partner is surprisingly subdued. Tony is infuriated when the Latinos lose because he feels the racial issue has distorted the aesthetic judgment, which he thinks should be kept pure. Yet he fails to see the connection between their style and their ethnic identity and never comments on the black dancers who also lose the contest. All of the dancing, of course, is actually shaped by choreographer Lester Wilson, who happens to be black. When one of Tony's buddies is bragging about his clothes, he says: "I look as sharp as I can look without being a nigger." This line not only exposes his racism, but also suggests how this ethnic stylistic expressiveness transcends dance. The film highlights Italians—a "white" ethnic minority that most Americans easily accept and even identify with despite, or perhaps because of their control over organized crime (as *The Godfather* shows us); the Italians succeed in an "art" (disco dancing) that was largely shaped by blacks, who are still perceived as a threat to American society and who are backgrounded in the film as losers. Of course, this is precisely the same formula that was so successful in *Rocky,* though there it was much more blatant.

Another problem is that the film-makers can't decide whether to make Tony's style a matter of

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personal expressiveness or racial identity. He is definitely identified as a working-class Italian, with posters of Sylvester Stallone as *Rocky* and Al Pacino as *Serpico* plastered all over his bedroom. Admittedly, Italians haven't been associated with dance since Valentino, with whom Travolta makes an interesting comparison—one that the film-makers consciously cultivate with Tony's "tango slides" and his modish seventies narcissism. In American movies, Italians are much better known for killing with style; hence, we even get a chance to watch Tony and his boys rumble with some Puerto Ricans (but the choreographed violence falls far short of what we've seen in *Westside Story* and *Clockwork Orange*).

The case for personal expressiveness is far more convincing. Tony's unique talents make him clearly superior to his buddies and his environment—which is the main lesson that his dance partner Stephanie has to teach him. This situation offers an interesting reversal of the black fairy-tale *Mahogany* that combined Cinderella and Horatio Alger: a black lawyer-turned-politician teaches "his woman" (superstar Diana Ross) that she's got to snatch her unique talents (as model and fashion designer) away from the decadent Europeans and "fags" and bring them back home to the old ghetto neighborhood where she can stand behind "her man." Whereas in that film the dazzling visuals of the fashion sequences contradicted the morality of the script (that was moderately liberal on the racial issue and hideously reactionary on sexual politics); in *Saturday Night Fever* the aesthetic superiority of the dance sequences is reaffirmed by the dialogue and by Stephanie, the female lead. However, the main aesthetic problem of the film is that the plot and the rest of the cast are too far out of Travolta's league.

The character of Stephanie (played by newcomer Karen Lynn Gorney) is symptomatic of Hollywood's treatment of women in the new era of sexual liberation. While clearly contrasting with the old stereotypes of nice girl and "cunt" (who are well represented in the film, particularly the latter category), she represents an inadequate attempt to break with the old clichés. A middlebrow Brooklyn 20-year old trying to better her life by climbing out of the slum, she may sleep around but she's still "worthy" of a young man's friendship. Like the Ellen Burstyn character in *Alice Doesn't Live Here,* what she has to offer is guts and ambition—yet, alas, she's a mediocre talent. Unlike Tony, she lacks originality and slavishly imitates others, but she has a slightly larger perspective that enables her to namedrop and to see beyond the disco dancefloor. In former years, she would have helped push "her man" to the top (like the reactionary Talia Shire character in *Rocky*); but, in this modish film she's trying to push herself and drags Tony along with her almost inadvertently. Part of the problem is the casting: Karen Gorney is simply not intriguing enough. Of course, she's not meant to be too pretty or sexy since she's breaking down the old clichés. Thank God she's not a plastic Farah Fawcett, whose poster hangs on Tony's bedroom walls along with Stallone and Pacino. Yet, the dialogue repeatedly tells us that Stephanie's supposed to be a wonderful dancer with energy and style; unfortunately, her performance simply doesn't live up to this billing. When she gets on the dance floor, she's supposed to be transformed. We're supposed to believe in the magic that happens between her and Tony when they dance. But the truth is, we'd much rather watch his solo performances because a mediocre partner is merely distracting. The film-makers may be aware of the problem. We witness Tony's disgust at another inadequate female partner, whom he ditches before prancing into a dazzling solo. In another scene, when he and Stephanie

John Travolta and Karen Lynn Gorney

are walking on the street, he asks her why they never talk about what happens between them when they dance. If we've seen enough Hollywood movies, we should know the "right" answers: she's afraid of the sexuality between them, talking might destroy the magic, action is better than words! But if we look for the answer in *Saturday Night Fever,* we might find it's because the words and the action contradict each other. The writers never bring up the subject again.

There are also terrible weaknesses in the plot. The story includes a gang rumble, a suicide, and a brother/priest who drops out of the church—all of which remain terribly undeveloped—but presumably give the feeling of a lot happening. There is a noble attempt to give some social context to the story of the individualistic Tony, but as in most American films (perhaps because we have no strong Marxist tradition) the results are sketchy and inadequate. As usual, a comprehensive understanding of social-economic-political dynamics is sacrificed for fast-paced action. The same problem plagues *Blue Collar,* in which Paul Schrader makes his directorial debut. Practically the only exception I can think of is *The Godfather,* which proves that exciting action and social analysis are not necessarily incompatible.

In the case of *Saturday Night Fever,* I suspect that the writers (Norman Wexler did the screenplay, which was based on a story by Nik Cohn) searched for the social background in Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn.* Tony's speech about the chain reaction of "dumping" (e.g., his father gets fired, so he *dumps* on his wife, who then *dumps* on her children, etc.; Italians *dump* on Spics, who *dump* on blacks, etc.) alludes to the thematic and structural center of Selby's novel. The mini-gang bang of Annette, the potential nice-girl who just wants to get the boys' attention, may be a watered down version of the brutal assault on Tra-La-La. And one suspects that the attacks on "fags," which seem so gratuitous in the film, may also have come from Selby's book, where they are absolutely crucial. I'm not suggesting that *Saturday Night Fever* should have been more like *Last Exit,* which is one of the great American works of this century (though I would be delighted to hear one of these days that someone in Hollywood was courageous enough to adapt it to the screen). Rather, I am complaining that this material has been transformed into a sketchy backdrop that has as much reality as a cartoon. In its present form, it evokes Leo Gorcey and his Bowery Boys more than it does *Last Exit.* Yet, what is so remarkable is that within this shallow context Travolta still manages to make Tony a convincing three-dimensional character, who combines sensitivity and vitality.

No wonder then that Travolta stands out as superior to the rest of the cast and the plot, just as Tony is to his buddies and neighborhood. Only in the dance sequences do the other aspects of the film come together sufficiently to enable him to express his full glory. One can easily imagine in the future the excerpting and anthologizing of these dance sequences like some of the Astaire-Rogers numbers and Busby Berkeley spectacles. Oh well, That's Entertainment!

—MARSHA KINDER

BREAKING WITH OLD IDEAS

Director: Li Wen-hua. Script: Chun Chao and Chou Chieh. October Films.

To a western viewer, the most disconcerting aspect of this recent Chinese film is that it seems so familiar. With its color, picturesque settings, fluid camerawork, persistently lyrical music, handsome heroes and heroines, touches of humor, and intricate, crisis-pitted plot, *Breaking with Old Ideas* is as accessible, as ingratiating, as high Hollywood. Its distribution in the US has, of course, been limited to specialized groups and theaters, such as the 199-seat Film Forum in New York where I saw it. Yet, except for one or two brief passages, such as the adulatory references to Mao, it would raise few jeers or guffaws from a drive-in audience—far fewer than such European films as *Heart of Glass* or *The Serpent's Egg.*

Even the central issue of the film is familiar, in different terms, to Americans. The action takes place between 1958 and 1961, a period when Chinese education policy began to place emphasis on the poorer peasants and on integrating study with productive labor. The conflict between those who want to maintain academic standards and

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are walking on the street, he asks her why they never talk about what happens between them when they dance. If we've seen enough Hollywood movies, we should know the "right" answers: she's afraid of the sexuality between them, talking might destroy the magic, action is better than words! But if we look for the answer in *Saturday Night Fever,* we might find it's because the words and the action contradict each other. The writers never bring up the subject again.

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those who urge open enrollment has had its counterpart in many areas of this country.

The film's main setting is a Communist Labor College (Agricultural College) near a small town in Kiangsi province in southern China. Lung Kuo-cheng, a former peasant in his forties who was with Mao in Yenan, is appointed principal of the school by an old Party associate. He finds that Tsao, the vice-principal, and Sun, the dean, want to emulate big city universities and impose high academic standards. As a result, a large group of young people from poorer families are being excluded from the entrance exam because they have inadequate qualifications. After questioning them about their work and political experience, Lung enrolls them as students. He and the students then plan and erect the college buildings, not near the town but up in the mountains.

After continuing disagreements between Lung and Tsao, the latter enlists the aid of deputy prefect Chao, a capitalist-roader who sends Lung off on a tour of other agricultural schools. In his absence, an important exam is scheduled. The night before, insect pests are discovered in the local production brigade's rice paddies, and all the workers are away buying fertilizer. One of the poor-peasant students, Li Chin-feng, calls on her colleagues to help spray the paddies with insecticide and save the crop. As a result, the poor-peasant students flunk the exam, and Tsao expels them. At this point Lung returns and cancels the expulsion order.

Lung's policies now remain in force. But conflict between Lung on one side and Tsao (who remains vice-principal) and Chao on the other flares into the open again after Chao plans to return some collective land to individual ownership. Li Chin-feng denounces the plan and is put in jail. A public meeting is held for the purpose of criticizing her. Instead, Lung and others defend her. Chao orders the college closed.

Lung tells the students he will appeal to Mao. At that moment the Party associate who appointed him turns up with the news that Mao has already endorsed the college and its policies. The film ends with a general demonstration of joy.

This outline omits many incidents and subplots[1] that strengthen the western viewer's impression of familiarity. The film opens with Lung, dressed as a peasant, poling a raft down a rapids-

Students criticizing their teachers' ideas.

studded river—a redeemer descending from the clouds like Shane, Johnny Guitar, and other Western heroes. The construction of the college is choreographed to music almost as rhythmically as the cabin-building sequence in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers.* And an episode on Lung's tour, when he sees how the bourgeois ways of a big city university lead a student to reject his mother and his peasant background, recalls Sarah Jane's treatment of her mother in *Imitation of Life.* However, the outline alone is enough to suggest at least a superficial similarity with the kind of populist melodrama exemplified by Frank Capra's films, in which a simple rural or small-town hero (Mr. Smith, Mr. Deeds, John Doe) confounds the sophisticated and corrupt denizens of the big city. The plot twists that threaten the smooth development of the Sungshan Labor College—temporary exile of Lung, pests coinciding with exams, the jailing of Chin-feng, etc.—find their parallel in the events that preclude George Bailey's departure from Bedford Falls in *It's a Wonderful Life,* where Potter the malev-(instead of benev-)olent capitalist mirrors Chao the selfish (instead of -less) communist.

Since *Breaking with Old Ideas* was made in 1975 (shot during the summer, released in December), at a time when Chiang Ching and her associates apparently controlled the arts in China, it might seem from current Chinese charges against the "gang of four" that the film's Hollywood elements are deliberate.[2] Not only is Chiang herself now branded a luxury-loving bourgeois, but her policies are described as attempts to sow

confusion and suspicion among loyal Party members and thus prepare the ground for a restoration of capitalism. However, similar charges have been leveled many times in the past against high officials (such as Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao) whose chief offense was to support policies that were later discredited, and the tendency to see conflicts in terms of all-good versus all-bad can be traced back in China's history and literature long before 1949.[3] Whatever the truth of the sweeping charges against the "gang of four," *Breaking with Old Ideas* itself offers little supporting evidence for them.

For example, in *Peking Review*, No. 8 (February 18) 1977, an article by Chao Chin states that "it is necessary to grasp class struggle as the key link, carry out education on the Party's basic line and criticize capitalism in the countryside. But the 'gang of four' opposed this, saying that these activities 'divert the general orientation of struggle.'" In the same issue, an unsigned article quotes Mao on educational policy: "Education must serve proletarian politics and be combined with productive labor." If these critics are correct, it seems that the "gang" could not have had much say in the making of *Breaking*, which proclaims the policies they are said to have opposed.

An article in *Chinese Literature* No. 7, 1977, spells out another major charge against the "gang": "They . . . lost no time in flooding the country with poisonous words vilifying our socialist system and our Party's glorious history. Veteran revolutionaries and leading government cadres were described as 'unrepentant capitalist-roaders' who must all be overthrown." While *Breaking* does indeed present some leading cadres as "unrepentant capitalist-roaders," it may be for a simple and nonpoisonous reason: without them, the film would lack the sharp (melo)dramatic conflicts to which Chinese audiences are accustomed. Since the early sixties the most widely performed dramas (whether in the form of stage play, film, ballet, or revised Peking opera) have dealt with pre-1949 events, with noble Reds on one side pitted against a variety of evil powers on the other: Japanese *(The Red Lantern)*, landlords and Japanese *(The White-Haired Girl)*, Kuomintang *(Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy)*, and so on.[4] But a film dealing with post-1949 life in China cannot find any villains powerful enough to stand up against Red heroes unless it draws on Party or government officials.

In this respect *Breaking* can be contrasted with *Spring Shoots*, a film made at about the same time and dramatizing a similar kind of institutionalized opposition to a "new idea"—the training of barefoot doctors in the mid-sixties. Not only is the plot more melodramatic, with the chief villain trying to kill one of the barefoot doctor's patients, but the heroine Chun-miao (her name means "spring shoot") does assail many leading cadres who may or may not be veterans. She says: "They represent a black revisionist line at different levels in the Party."[5] In *Breaking*, on the other hand, both Lung and Tang Ning (the official who appoints him as principal) are impeccable heroes who are clearly identified as veterans associated with Mao in Yenan, while vice-principal Tsao, though an old-timer, has no such background, and Chao is presented neither as a typical Party official nor as supported by higher echelons.[6]

Still, even if the overt message reflects the intended one, the Hollywood-like charm of *Breaking* and its attempt to introduce subtlety into a melodramatic conflict make it a difficult film for a western critic to appraise: no possible blend of aesthetic and political criteria seems satisfactory. In analyzing it I will therefore try as far as possible to use nothing but its own internal evidence and formal comparisons with other films. This means, not that I will magically obliterate my own outlook (which is a long way from that of Mao or Chiang Ching or Hua), but that I can dispense with any attempt to gauge the objective truth of events depicted in the film. For example, I do not have to decide whether the return to individual landholdings was in reality the decision of capitalist-roader officials (as the film suggests) or a concession made by the government in the face of peasant resistance to the rapid collectivization of the Great Leap Forward period (as many western analysts see it). In the same way, I can ignore elements with associations for Chinese audiences that they lack for westerners. For example, it was in the mountains of Kiangsi—a setting close to that of the film—that Mao set up the first Chinese soviets in the early thirties, and it was from there that the Long March began.

The film opens with the logo of the Peking

Film Studios—a red silhouette of Tien An Men with stars radiating outward rather like the Star Gate of *2001*. Then the credits are superimposed on a lengthy close-up of a standing wave in the river rapids. The striking contrast between red and blue seems to be fortuitous, since nothing else like it occurs in the film. Color is used as decoration, mainly to accentuate the natural settings—there are notably beautiful scenes of the rapids, a bamboo forest, wooded hills, a stream in and around which students relax, a sunset, and the spraying of the rice paddy at night—and, interestingly, the exteriors conform throughout to the western guidebook standards that Barthes cites as examples of bourgeois myth.[7]

There may be direct Hollywood influences on the technique of *Breaking*. In 1973 the Chinese bought four American-financed films—*The Sound of Music, Tales of Beatrix Potter, Tora! Tora! Tora!* and *The Go-Between*—presumably for their film-makers to study, since the idea of Kiangsi villagers watching the hangups of an English public schoolboy is even harder to imagine than the screening of *Breaking* at a Kansas drive-in. But the influence of these films can easily be overestimated. The lilting songs that accompany Chin-feng as she steers a raft carrying bamboo for construction, or Lung as he trots along the skyline in pursuit of an expelled student, have their roots in Chinese dramatic traditions, however much—to a western viewer—the hills seem alive with *The Sound of Music*.

The camerawork recalls 1960-vintage Hollywood: there are frequent sober pans and dollies; the old-style flashback is out and the new-style flash cut has not yet come in (the film contains just one brief flashback); and the zoom lens, still a novelty, is used conspicuously, most often to bring a character's face into close-up.

The faces themselves recall familiar Hollywood stereotypes. By any standards, the "good" characters are also good-looking. Lung is rugged and vigorous: like Gary Cooper, he speaks gently and smiles a lot, but shows no weakness or hesitation. Chin-feng—whose first appearance is accompanied by romantic wind music, her face held in proud close-up for several seconds—is tall and handsome, and looks about as much like a poor peasant as Jane Fonda. Tsao's daughter, Hsiao-mei, has the same petite charm as Gloria Grahame or Sally Field. On the other hand, Tsao himself is moon-faced, with a small black mustache and slicked back hair. Chao is round-faced and sedentary, and even to someone who knows no Chinese his voice rings with a precious "mandarin" quality. Dean Sun, who is eventually converted from the bad camp to the good, recalls both the looks and the anxious earnestness of Whit Bissell.

The emphasis on symbolic appearances extends to much more than the characters. The brief and lyrical college construction scenes are typical of the way in which manual labor is presented: a song accompanies Lung as he poles his raft downriver; Hsiao-mei sings as she hangs out the wash to dry; the students make a decorative pattern as they march through the rice paddies with their insecticide sprays—and those, plus two shots of the village blacksmith, are about the only glimpses of manual labor in the whole film. If we rarely see people actually doing farm or industrial work, we never see them eating, sleeping, washing, shaving, cooking, doing the dishes, house cleaning, mending, or performing almost any other down-to-earth everyday activity. For a supposedly materialist society, life seems extraordinarily idealist.

This sense of idealism, of abstraction, is heightened by the structure of the plot, which creates an enclosed world from which nearly all casual incidents are barred. Everything revolves around the same small group of characters. Tang Ning, who appoints Lung principal at the beginning, reappears at the end with the news of Mao's support. Yu Kang, a truck driver who hails Lung at the beginning, turns up later to head the college's agricultural machinery department. The blacksmith's assistant who wants to study tractors is shown toward the end driving one. A peasant who brings his sick water buffalo to the college and is rebuffed by Dean Sun ("This is a college, not a veterinary station!") returns near the end with the animal's calf, which the converted Sun now gladly treats.

The insularity of this world leaps into view when Lung goes off on his tour. On the train, he happens to sit next to a peasant woman who is going to visit her son at a big city university. When Lung arrives at the same university, he also happens to look through a window and see the woman being spurned by her bourgeoisified son,

so that he can rush in and console her. And in the only other setting where he is shown on his travels—the deck of a boat on the Yangtse River—who should he run into out of the other near-billion Chinese but his old comrade Tang Ning.

In the same narrow way, the film focuses on the problem of poor-peasant education to the exclusion of all others (except for the undeveloped reference to private land ownership). Whereas ailments are rife among the peasants in *Spring Shoots,* everyone in *Breaking* enjoys perfect health. Productivity, industrialization, communization, family life, the status of women and countless other issues simply do not exist within the framework of this film. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this single-minded approach—which is not too different from that of many Hollywood "problem" films—but *Breaking* fails to explore even the major implications of its chosen issue. For example, we are never shown what happens to the "upper" peasants who were taking the entrance exam when Lung arrived. Does the college have room to admit them too, or were they rejected to make room for the poorer peasants? If the poorer peasants lack qualifications, should something be done to improve the primary and middle school system? Or couldn't the college provide remedial courses?

Most disappointing of all, the film starts out by promising a genuine clash between old and new ideas, but then—although the latter could win on their own merits—loses its nerve and systematically stacks the deck against the former. At first Tsao is presented less as a villain than as a professional who may be taking his educational stand in good faith. But then he says to Dean Sun: "Actually I don't know much about [education]. When it comes to doing educational work, we have to rely on experts like you." And at the end he not only pulls strings to try to get his daughter into a city university but also actively supports Chao's private land ownership policy. By denying Tsao solid credentials and by nudging him toward villainy, the film abandons a genuine problem and goes in for facile attitudinizing. Of course, as I pointed out earlier, the genuine problem would not allow the melodramatic conflict that Chinese audiences expect, and so the shift may result from cultural as much as political demands. In any event, by resorting to a clash of heroes and villains, *Breaking* ironically ends up resembling the type of Hollywood film (of which *On the Waterfront* is a classic example) that "solves" a social or political issue in terms of personalities—a resemblance that the close-ups of and zooms toward faces do nothing to dispel.

To some extent I have been subjecting *Breaking with Old Ideas* to the kind of analysis that became popular among Marxist critics after *Cahiers du Cinéma* took *Young Mr. Lincoln* apart in 1970. In *Cahiers'* terms, the handling of the educational issue reveals "structuring absences" which in turn reveal the "repression . . . of politics."[8] Indeed, political conflict plays as illusory a role in *Breaking* as in American anti-Communist films of the McCarthy era. The ruling ideology is presented as a natural medium, and all problems dissolve as soon as those who oppose it are defeated or converted.

These opponents cannot win because the chief defender of the ruling ideology is superhuman. All the attributes of "otherness" that Bill Nichols points to in Ford's Lincoln and Wyatt Earp apply abundantly to Lung: the "tableau framings and low-angle heroic shots"; his "function of bringing order-from-above"; his "mythic, otherworldly proportions as mediator"; and the fact that he himself cannot be 'had,' possessed, known . . . [, that the] mythic level of his operation banishes him from the realm of real conditions and real relations . . . and openly situates him at the level of ideology."[9]

Lung descends from the mountains like a redeemer, arrives at Sungshan just in time to admit the poor-peasant candidates, returns from his tour just in time to rescue those who are expelled, and appears at the criticism meeting just in time to defend Chin-feng; he is on hand to witness the encounter between the peasant woman and her bourgeois son, to overhear two students criticizing the Sungshan college, and to prevent Tsao from tearing down a wall poster; in short, he shows himself throughout to be ubiquitous, all-seeing, all-hearing and all-wise. True, the film makers and the actor playing Lung work hard to make him seem human: he smiles a lot and cracks several mild jokes ("Old Representative [to Lung, who has concealed his identity]: 'Comrade, you sound as if you know Principal Lung." "Well enough," Lung answers casually. Hsiao-mei puts

her hand over her mouth and giggles"), on two occasions displays righteous anger and once sheds tears of joy—but unlike Lincoln and Earp he never reveals any human weaknesses. Lung is invulnerable to fear, doubt, hate, and love.

But then no one in the film succumbs to love: the repression of sexuality is even more complete than that of politics. I am referring not to the absence of any Hollywoodian "love interest" but to the systematic elimination of relationships that might suggest sexual desire or activity. There are of course no women in Lung's present life and no hint of any in the past. The same applies to Tang Ning, Yu Kang, Dean Sun, and the male students, as well as (substituting "men" for "women") to all of the female characters except two. Li Chin-feng, described as a former child-bride, has a small daughter who is seen on two brief occasions; but her husband never appears either on the screen or in anyone's conversation. Similarly, the husband of the peasant woman on the train remains in limbo, even during the flashback to her home. The same marital blank extends to the villainous characters: neither Deputy Prefect Chao nor his secretary Chien are shown to be married; Vice-Principal Tsao has a daughter and greedy middle peasant Yu Chia-wang has a son, but in neither case is there any sign of a wife. In short, not only does the film avoid any hint of sexual attraction between the unmarried students, but it suppresses the possibility of sexual relations even within marriage.

Both the script and the direction indicate the force of this sexual repression. The frequent zooms seem to be directed less toward faces than away from other areas of the body. But even faces are not safe. The close-up of Chin-feng, when she approaches Lung as a would-be student, represents the first meeting of hero and heroine, and could thus carry sexual implications. To defuse these, Lung is made to give Chin-feng an impromptu writing test, and within seconds the two of them are separated by a piece of paper bearing the characters: "Chairman Mao is our savior." Chairman Mao has indeed saved them: from now on they can be seen only as brother and sister.

The film's one explicit reference to genital sex concerns animals, not humans, and it exposes the castrating power that lies hidden or disguised elsewhere. Yu Fa-ken, son of greedy Yu Chia-wang, is pushed by his father to make a profit from his studies: the other students raise an outcry when they learn that he is charging a fee for, of all things, castrating pigs. This topic continues through four separate scenes, and it returns with a new twist during the criticism meeting near the end. After Lung has defended Chin-feng and denounced the capitalist-roaders, Fa-ken rushes up onto the stage and flings his bamboo moneybox down on the floor. "I was wrong," he says. "My father told me to make money by castrating pigs. From now on I'll follow the Party." There is a close-up of the smashed box—which, being made from a section of bamboo stalk, strongly resembles a phallus—with coins spilled from it like seed.[10]

By looking outside the text of the film one can find what I might call a nonrepressive reason for the exclusion of sex. The status of women in China still reflects the institutionalized inferiority of the past: as a sympathetic observer, Marceline Loridan, puts it,[11] "sexual freedom for women in China today means, in the first place, monogamy—the right to choose one's own husband." In these circumstances, the introduction of romantic or marital relationships into *Breaking* might have raised the issue of sexism, to the detriment of the film-makers' one-problem-at-a-time approach.

However, the evidence of the film itself suggests that this is not the makers' only motive. Whether in the form of a married couple sharing the same bed or a boy and girl decorously enjoying each other's company, sex draws attention to people as individuals with their own private experiences. Eating, sleeping, and strenuous labor may have much the same effect, reminding viewers that even the most unified masses are rooted in countless separate bodies. Since the film excludes nearly all of these latter, apparently innocuous activities, its relentless extirpation of sex can hardly pass for an accident or a cool pragmatic decision.

I started out with a more or less positive view of *Breaking with Old Ideas* and have modulated into the negative. The film itself follows a similar course. In fact, because it begins so well, promising to break with (recent) old ideas in Chinese film-making, the limitations behind which it soon takes refuge seem painfully narrow. I would have

felt no such disappointment with a film that remained at *White-Haired Girl* level throughout. But neither, of course, would I have felt enough interest to study and write about it.

—WILLIAM JOHNSON

NOTES

1. An English translation of the full script of *Breaking with Old Ideas*, conforming to the film's action (I cannot vouch for the dialogue) in all but a few minor details, appears in *Chinese Literature*, No. 6, 1976.
2. According to the American distributors, *Breaking* is no longer shown in China—or available for further release in this country.
3. As Joe C. Huang points out in *Heroes and Villains in Communist China: The Contemporary Chinese Novel As a Reflection of Life* (New York, 1973), traditional Chinese literature divides characters sharply into "loyal" and "disloyal," and it was only under western influence that Chinese writers in the early 20th century began to take an interest in "mixed" characters.
4. For a selection of such dramas in Chinese-approved English translations, see Walter J. and Ruth I. Meserve, *Modern Drama from Communist China* (New York and London, 1970) or Lois Wheeler Snow, *China on Stage* (New York, 1972).
5. *Chinese Literature*, No. 10, 1976.
6. An even more specific criticism is cited in a report by Harrison Salisbury of a recent trip to China (*The New York Times Magazine*, December 4, 1977). According to Shanghai film director Ling Chi-hao, Chiang Ching "instructed the studios that films should not properly be shot against the light: this was a typical 'bourgeois' technique. Instead, they should pose the heroes and heroines beside a window and use back or side light, avoiding full face shots." These instructions may have become somewhat garbled in transit; at any rate, *Breaking* contains many full-face shots (including close-ups) and all angles of lighting.
7. *Mythologies* (Paris 1957).
8. *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 223, August 1970.
9. Bill Nichols, "Style, Grammar, and the Movies," *Film Quarterly*, Spring 1975.
10. Although the familiar psychoanalytic connection is between money and excrement, Freud's paper "On the Transformation of Instincts with Special Reference to Anal Eroticism" (1916) declares that feces and penis "are easily interchangeable" in the unconscious.
11. "Entretien avec Joris Ivens et Marceline Loridan," *Cahiers du Cinéma* No. 266-7, May 1976: Ivens and Loridan had been working in China on the 12-hour documentary *How Yukong Moved the Mountains*. The same point is made more extensively in Katie Curtin, *Women in China* (New York, 1975).

THE MAN WHO LOVED WOMEN

Director: Francois Truffaut. Script: Truffaut, Michel Fermaud, and Susan Schiffman. Photography: Nestor Almendros.

Truffaut's latest comedy, *The Man Who Loved Women*, presents an extremely perceptive portrait of an obsessive "skirt-chaser" named Bertrand, brilliantly played by Charles Denner. In the past, Truffaut has usually cast a woman in the role of the promiscuous seducer, and made her far more dangerous than Bertrand; his *femme fatale* frequently led her lovers to their death. In contrast to the promiscuous mankiller who stars in *Such a Gorgeous Kid Like Me* (and writes her memoirs like Bertrand), this hero is far more destructive to himself than to the women he loves. His obsession seems to be a defense against the vulnerability that plagues most of Truffaut's male characters; they are frequently adolescents, who suffered rejection by a cold seductive mother and who are now capable of abandoning themselves to the kind of wild romantic passion portrayed in *The Story of Adele H.* In fact, *The Man Who Loved Women* is actually the comic flip-side of the tragic *Story of Adele H* with a sexual inversion. As Beverle Houston and I have observed, this is a familiar strategy for Truffaut since "in many ways, *Gorgeous Kid* is the farcical flip-side of *The Wild Child*."[1]

Despite the dark tragic intensity of *Adele H* and the light comic casualness of *The Man Who Loved Women*, both films focus on sexual obsessions, which, though contrasting, are partially blamed on the rejection by and subsequent imitation of the parent of the opposite sex, are recorded in personal memoirs, and inevitably lead to isolation and destruction (insanity for Adele and death for Bertrand). Although Bertrand's death may seem accidental as well as silly (he is run over by a passing motorist on the boulevard while chasing a pretty pair of legs, and later in the hospital he inadvertently disconnects his plasma while trying to get a better look at the nurse's gams), it is inevitably tied to his particular mania. He loves to watch women walk and repeatedly remarks that a woman's legs are like the

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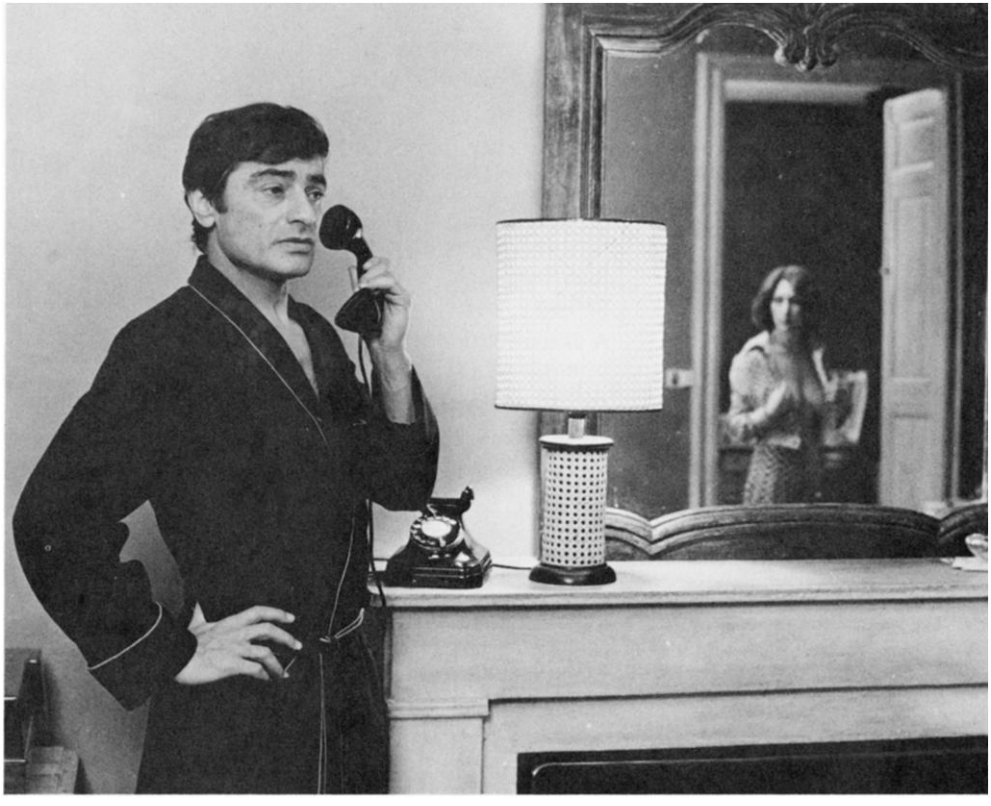


THE MAN WHO LOVED WOMEN

stems of a compass that move around the world. Besides evoking Donne's celebrated metaphysical conceit comparing a pair of lovers with a compass in *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning,* this image reveals that the course for Bertrand's romantic quest is as doomed as Captain Ahab's. He sees slender, sirenous legs everywhere—even, as in the wonderful airport sequence, when they are not really present—and they lead him to his ineluctable fate. Like Adele, he simultaneously emerges as a pathetic victim of his own obsession and as courageously independent in pursuing his unique vision.

I don't want to exaggerate the similarities. *Adele H,* one of Truffaut's best films, is dominated by a masochistic aesthetic whereas *The Man Who Loved Women,* a minor work, shares many characteristics of a sadistic world, at least as delineated by Giles Deleuze in his brilliant book entitled *Masochism.* Deleuze's main thesis is that sado-masochism is not a single complex as Freud assumed, but rather "the sadist and the masochist might well be enacting separate dramas, each complete in itself, with different sets of characters and no possibility of communication between them." (p.40). He argues that they form the basis of two contrasting aesthetics, which have the following characteristics that readily apply to Truffaut's two films.[2]

MASOCHISM	SADISM
The slave is in control.	The master is in control.
Tragically leads to narcissism and death.	Comically leads to protean transformations.
Prefers fantasy to action.	Prefers acting out to fantasy.
Values beauty and stasis—therefore tends to have a highly sensuous surface and a slow pace.	Values power and motion—therefore tends to have fast-paced action.

The slave makes a complete commitment to the beloved—leads to the romantic couple locked in the secret room.	The master seeks infinite variety—leads to the promiscuous individual manipulating interchangeable partners.
A persuasion to love.	A demonstration of a principle or will.
Desire to return to the past.	Desire to control the future.
Desire to remain the dependent child.	Desire to become the authoritative parent.
Desire to cancel out the father.	Desire to negate the mother.

Like Freud, Deleuze argues that regardless whether the person in question is male or female, masochism represents a feminine point of view and sadism a masculine perspective. This sexist identification is undoubtedly rooted in social conditions rather than in biology since our culture tends to define the authoritarian position (whether God, King, President, Judge, Cop, or Father) as masculine and to confuse women with children. Although Truffaut crosses these sexual lines in many of his earlier films (e.g., *Jules et Jim, The Bride Wore Black, Mississippi Mermaid,* and *Such a Gorgeous Kid Like Me*) where women are both feminine *and* sadistic, and men both masculine *and* masochistic, in *Adele H* and *The Man Who Loved Women* he explores the contribution of conventional sex roles in forming these destructive obsessions. The heroic expressions of romantic idealism in the realms of politics and art are not accessible to Adele H. as they are to her celebrated father Victor Hugo; boys like Bertrand who are raised without a father as a masculine model frequently become ladies' men as a means of asserting their sexual identity and resisting the seductive powers of their mother.

Although he is clearly not a sadist in the sense of being turned on by cruelty or by inflicting physical pain, Bertrand is nevertheless a control freak. Yet he takes a defensive approach; he is less concerned with manipulating others than with wielding control over his own life in order to avoid pain. Over his bed, there hangs a framed portrait of a man's hand, which visually expresses his desire for control. On his job in a laboratory, he tests miniature airplanes against man-made waves under highly controlled conditions; this profession enables him to simulate dangerous adventures without any real risk that might lead to a fear of flying. His manner is intense but focused, his body trim and wiry, his clothes uniform—narrow pants, a grey crew neck sweater, and a short, well-tailored brown leather jacket. His life has been simplified, pared down to minimal needs and regulated by rigid rules. Some are implicit; for example, he obviously never has affairs with women at work, despite the yearning glances of one cute co-worker (we know he has noticed her for he includes her in a dream, just as Truffaut always highlights her in the laboratory sequences). Other rules are explicit; for example, he is never seen with men after work (except for a doctor whom he consults when he gets the clap), and he never lets women sleep over in his apartment. He goes over the same limited steps with new partners, avoiding the risk of any deeper involvement and minimizing the possibilities of rejection. Yet, he is capable of stoically withstanding disappointment (he pursues one pair of legs to another town but unfortunately tracks down the wrong woman and then demonstrates a comic resilience by settling for a third woman who generously gave him the wrong lead) and an unpredictable rejection by an aging redhead named Hélène (Geneviève Fontanel) who makes love only with men under thirty. He also shapes his life by writing his memoirs—compulsively cataloguing his conquests, consciously deciding what to emphasize (his comic triumphs), what to play down (his relationship with his mother), and what to omit entirely (his painful affair with Vera, probably the only woman he ever really loved).

Yet, his one dream in the film tells a very different story. He looks in the display window of a lingerie shop, and watches Hélène, the shopkeeper (who in reality rejected him for being too old), dressing not a female dummy but Bertrand, who is transformed into a lifeless mannequin, or dehumanized sex object. Sympathetic women amass at the window to view the lifeless dummy, foreshadowing his funeral that is attended only by women. This anxiety dream alludes not only

to his death, but also to the wish that lies beneath his repetition compulsion—his love for women is based on a desire to be one himself. On his deathbed, his final words confirm the wish—he is determined to go to an island inhabited only by women and be accepted as one of them.

The dream is, of course, the product of Bertrand's unconscious; his conscious mind has deliberately chosen to pursue control. Yet three encounters reveal him flirting with masochism, acknowledging the alternative course he has rejected. One day he finds a little 8-year old girl crying and convinces her that she is actually pleased with her tears, forcing her to acknowledge her incipient masochism and revealing his own familiarity with its attractions. He allows himself to be manipulated by the intensely passionate Delphine (Nelly Borgeaud), a masterful masochist, who forces him to take risks that turn her on and who then complains, "Look what you made me do." With her he comes closest to playing lovers in the secret room, even breaking his rule and letting her sleep over to satisfy her jealous suspicions. Out of her love for Bertrand, Delphine shoots her husband and then suffers in prison; she may threaten his autonomy and control, but she alleviates the boredom implicit in Bertrand's repetition compulsion. When he accidentally encounters Vera in Paris, he tries to avoid her and reveals his pain. At first we are baffled by her identity—why hasn't he mentioned her before? Could this possibly be his young mother? But then we learn that it is an ex-lover, who left him five years ago, who perhaps reminds him of his mother, and someone whom he desperately wants to forget. We wonder why Truffaut has cast the most well-known star (Leslie Caron) in this role, particularly since she appears only in this one brief scene. It's as if she has accidentally blundered into his film as well as into the story of Bertrand's life. In a later scene when he is dressing, Bertrand retrieves a tie from his wardrobe, exposing a long row of snapshots of Vera and revealing that he is a closet romantic after all. This verdict is confirmed when he calls his editor in a panic, determined to rewrite his autobiography since the whole thing was written for Vera, whom it never mentions. The editor advises him to write another book about her—perhaps something more in the vein of *Jules et Jim, Mississippi Mermaid,* or *Adele H.*

Of course we know that behind the fictional persona of Bertrand, it is really Truffaut who is controlling the scenes. In the opening sequence we even catch a glimpse of him girl-watching at Bertrand's funeral. One way he exercises his power is by including several critics of his hero's story, anticipating and thereby manipulating the audience's reaction to his own film. Bertrand's first critical reader is a middle-aged bourgeoise typist, who "blacklists" his manuscript because it outrages her morality and upsets her sleep; surely we don't want to identify with this prig! The men in the publishing office, who are old, unattractive, or effeminate, don't like it or don't take it seriously for several reasons: it has no point; it needs more fully developed psychological explanations, particularly concerning his relationship with his mother (which Truffaut restricts to black and white flashbacks); its hero is infantile, neurotic and pathetic. These judgments are very reminiscent of the harsh verdicts delivered by the pompous intellectual critic in Fellini's *8 1/2,* whom Guido gleefully hangs in one fantasy sequence. Bertrand's most sympathetic critic is his editor, Geneviève (Brigitte Fossey) a liberated modern woman, reminiscent of Rosella in *8 1/2* who reaffirms Guido's freedom and encourages him to accept the contradictory parts of his nature. Similarly, Geneviève interprets Bertrand's story in highly optimistic terms—insisting that

THE MAN WHO LOVED WOMEN

he gives most women what they want, he appreciates their uniqueness, he retains his own freedom while granting them theirs, he acknowledges their equality, and he eliminates the power struggle from romance. Naturally, this evaluation is not based solely on an objective reading, but on a brief affair which she initiates with the author. While Bertrand is only narcissistically interested in telling his own story, Geneviève enlarges its frame of reference and interprets it as an illuminating commentary on contemporary relationships or a modern grammar of the new rules governing sexual games. She rejects traditional psychological explanations, except for the current cliché so popular among EST graduates and so frequently used to justify narcissism: "You have to love yourself in order to love someone else." She persuades him not to revise his manuscript and even changes the title from *The Skirt Chaser* (his crass choice) to the more positive *The Man Who Loved Women* (which Truffaut obviously prefers). When Bertrand questions the use of the past tense (love*d*), she claims it sounds better and is more consistent with his memoir style (and with Truffaut's flashback structure); yet it really helps to justify the funeral frame (a convention that was previously used romantically in *The Barefoot Contessa,* claustrophobically in Bresson's *Une Femme Douce,* and preposterously in Ken Russell's *Valentino*) and her role as narrator, which forces Bertrand to share the control with her. Hence her interpretation becomes valid because she actually transforms the work by her own initiative. Thus, unlike the poor male sociologist who collaborates with Camilla Bliss on her memoirs in *Gorgeous Kid,* Hélène is not a passive victim but an active "accomplice." One can't help wondering what connection she bears with Susan Schiffman, Truffaut's longtime collaborator, who on this film was his assistant and who (along with Truffaut and Michel Fermaud) is credited with the screenplay, and who also had a role in Truffaut's previous autobiographical film, *Day for Night.*

Of course, neither *The Man Who Loved Women* nor *Day for Night* is as blatantly autobiographical as Fellini's *8 1/2.* It's as if Truffaut separated the two main themes which Fellini intertwines—the creative process of a middle-aged artist *(Day for Night)* and his obsessive pursuit of women *(The Man Who Loved Women)*—and which Fellini was to recombine in *Casanova* (although there the autobiographical dimension is even more subdued). Nevertheless, Bertrand bears striking similarities with Fellini's Guido. Another skirt-chaser befuddled by contradictions, Guido is also unable to pass up any woman, yet yearns for romantic love with an ideal goddess; he's a comic sadist who fantasizes about a harem where he can crack a whip to the strains of Wagner, yet retains the infantile, narcissistic wish to be wrapped in a warm towel by a loving mother to the soothing tones of a lullaby. Both men want to turn their contradictory instincts and adventures into an autobiographical work of art. Yet whereas Guido ends up reaffirming the values of spontaneity and extravagance, Bertrand clings desperately to his rigid game plan right to the end. Unlike Fellini, Truffaut does not really seriously explore the creative process in this film. Perhaps *The Man Who Loved Women* plus *Day for Night* add up to *8 1/2.* Perhaps not.

—MARSHA KINDER

NOTES

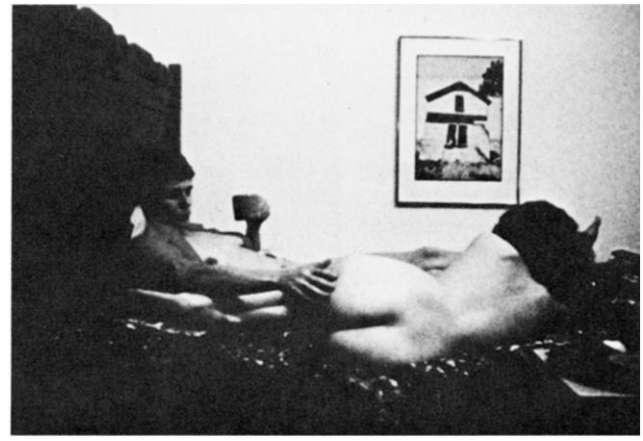
1. "Both films present an encounter between two people possessing entirely different bodies of knowledge—the civilized and the wild. *The Wild Child* focuses on what the nature boy has to sacrifice in order to acquire the benefits of civilization, thereby stressing the values of both worlds (and developing a tragic vision, since both choices involve loss). But the darkly comic *Gorgeous Kid* emphasizes the inadequacies of both worlds; the professor's civilized naiveté does not protect him from Camilla the predator." ("Truffaut's Gorgeous Killers," *Film Quarterly,* Winter 73-74, p. 6)
2. The chart that follows is not found in Deleuze's book, but is based on selections from and elaborations of his theoretical construct.

CONTRIBUTORS, cont'd.

independent films for many years, is also a poet, and possesses a Ph.D. in ancient Breton lays. BILL NICHOLS is head of the film program at Queen's University, Kingston, Ont., and editor of *Movies and Methods.* DON WILLIS has published on Renoir and Buñuel in *Sight & Sound,* and is working on a long Ozu article. DAN YAKIR has written for *The Village Voice, Sight & Sound, The Soho Weekly News,* and is writing a book about French cinema.

11 x 14

A film by James Benning. Distribution: Filmmakers Coop, N.Y.



Perhaps because he comes from the Midwest, where fashionable trends become healthfully attenuated in the wide open spaces (I know because I lived in Chicago for seven years) James Benning has achieved the unusual feat of constructing a structuralist film that is actually interesting to watch. Audiences sit through it to its feature-length end. And yes, you never forget—if you happen to have regrettable tendencies in that direction—to remember you are watching a film.

Like most successful experimental films, *11 x 14* is not easy to describe verbally. It is made up of discrete slices of Midwestern scenes, often from static camera positions, though occasionally Benning indulges in a pan. The images have a bright, post-card quality; they are often "painterly" in the magic-realist vein—lots of saturated color, straight-on observation of American street scenes. Many of them Bazin would call one-shot sequences: you watch an entire action, such as it is, from a single, somewhat detached point of view. I say "such as it is" because Benning has contrived the events of his film with clever offhandedness. The film serves up paradoxes, but in about as mundane a guise as you can conceive. Somebody—you're never quite sure in *11 x 14* if you may have seen a character in an earlier scene—tries unsuccessfully to start a car. A pick-up truck comes along, gives her a lift, and exits right. You hear it drive away. The camera then slowly pans left and, magically, the pick-up is found there, proceeding offscreen left. This is a cinematic equivalent of Escher, I suppose; Benning disrupts the sound-image conjunction and puzzles your "normal" perceptual machinery. (You then go on, no doubt, to reflect that what sounds like synch-sound is not at all, and that he must have had the pick-up drive around behind the camera and thus take up its leftward movement.) But this doesn't seem, in the context of *11 x 14,* like a mere technical feat or tour de force; it is just a little more puzzling than the other puzzles. Benning is a mathematician, as well as artist, and presumably loves technical paradox. He also knows that human thought structures are convention-shaped, and that just as in mathematics you can create a whole new set of theorems by changing a single axiom, in film you can do something rather similar.

What he mainly does, in *11 x 14,* is to deploy some of the familiar conventions of narrative in truncated forms—that is, he actually cuts them off. A scene begins, which might in the usual film develop in any of a finite (indeed not even very large) number of ways: a woman is washing dishes, a man is sitting at the kitchen table having a drink and cigarette; across the hall in the background, a young person flits back and forth. The sink water runs; nobody speaks. Does the tension grow? Is something about to happen? Our normal perceptual salivation processes are ready. But Benning just cuts it off; nothing has happened, and he emphasizes the point by cutting in mid-sentence. (Still, something *might.* Is this the same middle-aged man whom we saw in the first shot,

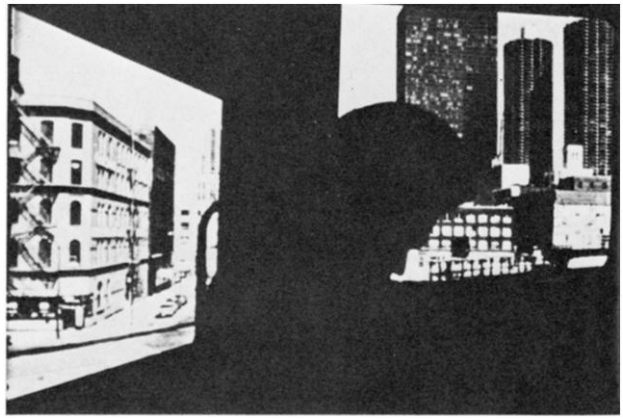
James Benning—portrayed, appropriately enough, in a car.

talking earnestly on a bleak street with a different, young, slender woman? There are about a dozen or so characters in the film who appear and then reappear; you can connect them in the permutations and combinations that seem most likely.)

Benning says that what he is really interested in is manipulating space. And he does that, no question of it. But so does any film-maker. What is different about *11 x 14* is that it manipulates space in blocks, so to speak; it seizes chunks of the world and almost physically manhandles them. A car which, we have learned previously, probably contains two young women and two young men hitchhikers they have picked up, drives into a motel courtyard—we see it from behind, in very long shot. Somebody gets out and enters the motel office. After a while, he or she reappears, gets back in the car. The camera laboriously pans left as the car backs up and drives over to a row of motel rooms, stops; as its occupants begin to get out, Benning cuts. (The cuts between scenes are emphasized by white frames and a moment of black, incidentally, throughout.) Or a young woman drives up to a gas pump in a bright red Corvette; suddenly the camera reverses field, turning the world around 180° so that the car seems to be facing the other way. Benning also likes to play with the way a "flat" image—say two people against a retaining wall—suddenly assumes depth if a car passes in the foreground.

As it has gone around the festival circuit, winning prizes at Ann Arbor and Athens, a good deal has been made of the Midwestern quality of

11 x 14: cutting off the flat image.



11 x 14. And indeed it has a documentary side. Benning takes us on a lengthy ride on the Chicago L at dawn, and down seedy streets as well as along freeways in the countryside. In its constant consciousness of cars, *11 x 14* is superbly American; only in the (relatively few) interior scenes do people escape the sight and noise of cars, which are as close to us as our clothes. And in the manner in which people vagrantly pass in and out of the film, we may also read a certain documentary intent—indeed, this mainly bleak, car-infested landscape is not the best of possible worlds. As far as I can remember, nobody smiles in *11 x 14.* There is what may be a sigh of pleasure in a charming intimate scene between two women; a young man, perhaps the one from the kitchen scene, attempts to draw a smile on his own face with lipstick, but the lipstick breaks.

The world that *11 x 14* gives us, then, is a broken world. Instead of the factitious continuities of the feature-film's geography, Benning hacks off the blocks and chunks, full of events that possess no certain meaning. He leaves it to us—not making it easy, or perhaps even possible—to try and make sense of it. Meanwhile, as we puzzle at the film he gives us plenty to look at. Much of the imagery is lovely: a billowing steamcloud from an industrial chimney (which, regrettably, he keeps onscreen while he runs an entire Dylan song—a song we've already heard once, moreover); a plane against a startlingly blue sky; the rosy dawn light on Chicago's filth-encrusted buildings. And much of it involves activities which have a certain inscrutable appeal: the teamwork of people running a hay-baling rig in a hot Wisconsin field, a baseball infielder poising repeatedly for the pitch, his unconscious gestures isolated and sparkling against the rust and green

of the background. Benning has a gift for picking such items out of the random flux without seeming dumb about it. We know there is a meaning there, lurking behind the opaque surface of those actions; it is not just home-movie footage. But will we ever really find it? No doubt there is, ultimately, no more meaning to a film structure than to a mathematical one; pattern is all. And through the maze pattern Benning has constructed, we can scurry along, doing our best with the convention-reading apparatus we have so painfully perfected. It is, I think, the stoic drollery of this situation which gives *11 x 14* its power.

—ERNEST CALLENBACH

LISZTOMANIA

Dector: Ken Russell. Script: Russell. Photography: Peter Suschitzky. Music: Rick Wakeman.

Though the films of Ken Russell have always exhibited a strong penchant for the *cinefantastique*—from his earliest short subjects for the BBC and through the subsequent theatrical features—the deliberate use of fantasy as an integral facet of Russell's cinematic vocabulary and style has become increasingly overt until, with films like *Tommy* and *Lisztomania* (and to a certain degree, the earlier *Mahler*), all barriers between the realistic and the fantastic modes have virtually ceased to exist.

At its most obvious *Lisztomania* is a wildly free-form biography of the nineteenth-century piano-virtuoso and composer, Franz Liszt (1811-1886). As such the film is a direct descendent of Russell's BBC biographies *Elgar* (1962), *Bartok* (1964), *The Debussy Film* (1965), *Song of Summer* (1968), a chronicle of the last years of Frederick Delius, of the explosively controversial treatment of Richard Strauss, *The Dance of the Seven Veils* (1970), and of such feature-length films as *The Music Lovers* (1970), a delirious version of Tchaikowsky's life, and *Mahler* (1974).

The earliest of these endeavors was incredibly well received, *Elgar* being one of the most popular films ever aired by British television. However, beginning with the Strauss film (significantly, the one which most anticipates the style of Russell's theatrical features), Russell's energetic departure from a strict "realism" and his ever-increasing emphasis on an imaginative restructuring of historical fact, began to regularly confound his critics. This confusion was in large part the inevitable result of many critics' dogged insistence on evaluating works like *The Music Lovers, Mahler* and most recently *Lisztomania,* by the criteria of "straight" biography. Far from being the screen's equivalent of Grove's Dictionary of Music, Ken Russell is an intuitive symbolist and fantasist, a total film-maker who orchestrates his subjects in much the same manner that a composer might transcribe a musical composition from one interpretive medium into another (as, for example, Liszt himself did with certain works by Wagner and Berlioz and other composers of the period) or as an instrumentalist might improvise variations on a given theme: *Lisztomania,* based on Russell's own brief 57-page screenplay, was mostly shot, as is the director's custom, "in the head," making the improvisational analogy that much more tenable. Shooting commenced on Feb. 3, 1975 at England's Shepperton Studio Center, and was completed a quick fourteen weeks later.

Possessed of an uncanny instinct for correlating music, image and symbol, Russell is one of the few contemporary film-makers to appreciate the high-voltage potential of fantasy for use in "legitimate" (i.e., non-horror, non-science fiction) films and thereby also to advance the neglected art of blending cinematic with musical techniques, music being the ideal adjunct for the realization of cinematic flights of fantasy. Deftly merging the two highly compatible areas of endeavor with an eye and ear unmatched since the early Disney, Russell has almost singlehandedly forged a unique new genre, one which might be described as the "documentary musical fantasy."

A glance into the music dictionary provides some surprising insights into Russellian interpretation. Films like *Mahler* and *Lisztomania* exist not as conventional narratives drawn from cold, documented fact, but rather as "fantasias" on the lives of the composers under consideration. A "fantasia" is described (in Elson's Pocket

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version) as "a species of musical form in which the composer yields to his imagination and gives free scope to his ideas, with little regard to restrictions in form; fancy, an imaginative caprice."

To provide the raw material for his particular type of "caprice," Russell turns not to the biographer's text, but to the music itself. At the conclusion of *Lisztomania,* Marie d'Agoult comments to Liszt: "The bad is dead and gone. The best of us lives, enshrined in the music for everyone to share." It is from this "best"—all, finally, that concretely remains of the transient, often turbulent life of a creative artist—that Russell derives his inspiration. As John Baxter notes in his excellent book, *An Appalling Talent: Ken Russell:* "Russell shows that the truth is found less in the events of an artist's life than in his music and its effect on listeners." Of *Lisztomania* the director himself said: "Music for me is the most incredible event in the history of the human race. It comes from nowhere. You can't expect the composer to fit into the usual idea of normal behavior patterns. My film isn't biography. It comes from things I feel when I listen to the music of Wagner and Liszt, and when I think about their lives." Within the superb synthesis of music, feeling, effect, and image, "with little regard to restrictions in form," do Russell's best moments reveal their dynamic power.

As with certain other Russell films, however, *Lisztomania* seems on first viewing to be merely a sprawling, episodic, and chaotic Zap Comix version of its subject. But closer attention to the director's witty screenplay discloses a structure considerably more developed and coherent than that of his previous *Tommy.* Designed almost like an opera, with five major scenes situated between a prologue and an epilogue, the script explores specific aspects of the composer's life and art within the context of a malleable but fundamentally accurate narrative which is intercut with aria-like flights of wildest fantasy. Each individual scene is fashioned around and motivated by one or more Liszt or Wagner composition.

A brief prologue introduces Liszt (in the person of the Who's Roger Daltrey) as the rakish lover, seducing with metronomic precision one of his piano pupils, Marie d'Agoult (Fiona Lewis), wife

Franz Liszt (Roger Daltrey) and Countess Marie d'Agoult (Fiona Lewis).

of a foppish aristocrat (John Justin). The first major sequence, musically based on both Liszt's imposing "Hungarian Fantasy" and on a satiric interplay between the pianist's transcription of Wagner's early opera, "Rienzi," and the crowd-pleasing "Chopsticks," is a riotous send-up of both the classical piano recital and the glitzy rock concert: Liszt, the Concert Virtuoso as Pop Star, willingly tailors his "material" to popular tastes and spares no effort in giving his "fans" exactly what they demand of him, musically and theatrically. Also established in this sequence is Richard Wagner's parasitic relationship to his contemporary, an attachment founded on envy and ambition, made rankling by the public's clamoring preference for Liszt's panache over Wagner's avowed "seriousness."

Scene Two, an improvisation on "Liebestraum" ("Dream of Love"), presents the composer at home with Marie (now his mistress) and their three children; by means of crisp dialogue and a hauntingly tender flash-back, Liszt's immense difficulty in maintaining a balance between his artistic and romantic/domestic entanglements is illustrated. Deciding to embark on another lucrative concert tour, he expresses to his daughter, Cosima (Veronica Quilligan) (whose inexplicable mastery of voodoo will bode ill for her father) his willingness to "sell his soul" in order to write "really great music."

Scene Three, a satanic divertimento of various Lisztian themes, takes place in the ornate St. Petersburg salon of the Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein (Sara Kestelman) who metamor-

Princess Carolyne, the Female Mephisto (Sara Kestelman).

phoses into a bat-winged, sexually aggressive female Mephisto who tempts Liszt with the power to become a great composer if he but place himself completely in her hands; the patronage pact is summarily sealed in an outrageous prophetic vision of a musical, High Camp Hell.

In Scene Four, inspired by various transcriptions of Liszt's heroic piano elegy, "Funerailles," ("Funeral Wreaths"), the expatriate composer realizes his dream while living under Carolyne's patronage in Weimar, Germany, in the years after his renunciation of the concert stage, and from this literally visualized "ivory tower" of art, a guilt-stricken Liszt surveys the spectacle of a revolution-ravaged Europe.

Finally, in the fifth and perhaps most audacious sequence, conceived as a manic clash of Lisztian and Wagnerian themes, Liszt as an Abbé, a secular priest not bound by vows of celibacy, is coerced into an ultimate confrontation with Wagner (portrayed with lip-smacking zest by an unctuous Paul Nicholas) who, as the final act of impingement on Liszt's life, has married his daughter. The Pope (Ringo Starr) pontificates that, because Cosima is married to "this Prince of Darkness," the church music to which Liszt has been devoting himself will be "put on the index and banned!" unless Wagner's soul is somehow saved. Thus, Liszt sets forth on a final mission of exorcism.

The Epilogue, a recapitulation of "Dream of Love," takes place in Heaven and finds Liszt in harmonious reunion with his previous loves, including Cosima. Looking down to earth and seeing the brutish monster which Wagner's music has created and unleashed on the world, Liszt mans a Love-powered, organ-piped spaceship to return to earth and blitz once and for all the Frankenstein/Golem/Hitler raging out of control.

One specific composition/theme runs like a Lisztian leit motif throughout the film: "Liebestraum," one of the composer's most famous and over-performed piano pieces. This idyll, the title of which seems to suggest to Russell the irony inherent in the Romantic impulse with its wistful insistence on the *dream* rather than the insidious *reality* of love, is gently exploited in one of the film's most unconventional and memorable sequences—a literally "hearts and flowers" *hommage* to *The Gold Rush* of Chaplin—another artist whose work is emphatically shaped by the Romantic sensibility. In this magical episode, prompted by the ghostly incanting of some old love letters by Liszt's mischievous because neglected children, the early days of the composer's affair with Marie in Switzerland are evoked in reverie. Inside a simple but romantically Swiss chalet, a Chaplinesque Liszt ecstatically and prolifically creates at an old upright piano while Marie happily knits on the sidelines. As her red, embroidered hearts gradually give way to the proliferating diapers which signal the arrival of yet another baby, the blankness of Liszt's manuscript paper matches his own loss of inspiration. Finally, the lovers bid farewell to their little nook and walk sadly off into the snow, the unfinished manuscript resting wanly on the abandoned piano, time and domesticity having gradually but implacably bled white the initially rich crimson of the creative and romantic impulse. As Eleanor Perenyi notes in *Liszt: The Artist as Romantic Hero* (Little, Brown, 1974): "Every love affair reaches a point that in retrospect ought to have been the finish, and it is at this point that many lovers decide to marry. That usually mistaken solution wasn't open to Liszt and Marie . . ."

Obviously such an episode is hardly constructed to ingratiate itself with those who demand their art history to be cut and dried and straight from the textbook. But, to those willing and capable of responding to Russell's innovative technique of Biography as Fantasia, the Chaplin sequence fuses idea, image, and music into an evocation of "how things could have been" as vivid in its

way as is Ms. Perenyi's excellent and witty account of how they actually were, and stands as a valid if speculative variation on a theme which is certainly a profound consideration in any treatment of the life of any creative artist of the period. And like the even more interpretatively bizarre sequence from *Mahler* in which Alma Mahler struggles to emerge from a mummy-like cocoon—an ineffable image and symbol for the struggle toward life and self-identity—the Liszt/Chaplin pairing penetrates to the essential motivation and feel of a particular set of artistic/emotional circumstances.

Via this unconventional method of documentation, Russell discerns the motivating passions and fallibilities with which the Romantic artist's life and creative processes are imbued, and with a validity neither hackneyed nor embarrassingly trivial as in the old-style Hollywood biographies. Since so many of the "facts" concerning the lives of artists from an earlier age can, finally, only be presumed and/or intuited, and since the "real" truths about art and its creation most conducive to visualization are those which most draw forth an emotional response, Russell's composer films, with their fantasies derived from the music itself, maintain their own integrity. Russell is obviously genuinely in love with art and deeply moved by it, particularly music, but just as obviously detests the sham, hypocrisy, and snobbism that sometimes surrounds its cult, thus his defiantly Pop approach at times.

Due to Russell's juxtapositioning, the Chaplin parody, with its use of stylized, cinematic clichés to render observations via (and on) a piece of music which has become a cliché itself, also allows the listener/viewer to react to both music and situation with a totally fresh response. One may have heard Liszt's "Liebestraum" countless times, but seldom responded to it as intensely as when Russell's bizarre yet coherent mixture of elements allows the over-exposed music to reveal itself as a "new" and freshly beautiful composition. The same might be said of all the music in the film. Aside from corresponding to Russell's vision of Liszt and Wagner as "the world's first two Pop stars," Rick Wakeman's jolting symphonic-electronic rock transcriptions *force* the listener to re-evaluate both the music itself *and* his own responses to it.

Admittedly, such a modus operandi is not suited to a rigorously intellectual or even minutely particularized treatment, and this perhaps constitutes a major flaw in Russell's method: he can masterfully convey the broad and fine outlines of his artwork tapestries, but the subtler intricacies of design must of necessity elude him. In this respect, *Lisztomania,* which is admirably self-contained for its own purposes, often whets the appetite for a more keenly examined presentation of its highly consequential material. And yet, when all the volatile elements of Russell's vision *do* jell, they possess a spell-binding power which both bypasses and transcends intellectual inquiry. To appreciate that vision means first of all to trust it, and then to respond with all the senses, including that of wonder.

Which is not to say that Russell's films lack intellectual substance. Despite their quixotic grounding in speculative emotionalism, most of Russell's composer films presuppose a certain level of knowledgeability on the part of his audiences. Nowhere does this become more apparent than in the finale to *Lisztomania* which, though

superficially a virtuosic toccata of pure, flagrant cinematic technique and style (like some of Liszt's own piano music), realizes almost every element of its content from a knowledge of late nineteenth and early twentieth century musical history, cultural trends, sociology, and philosophy; without at least some familiarity with these fields (not to mention the specifics of Wagnerian music and philosophy), viewers will find the film's climax (and many other elements fleetingly touched upon by Russell throughout *Lisztomania*) virtually meaningless in any but the broadest of terms. Like the sequence in *Mahler* in which the composer is converted to Christianity by an Amazonian, Nazi-costumed Cosima Wagner, *Lisztomania*'s finale is another send-up of Wagner's interminable cycle of operas, "The Ring of the Nibelung," a set of four monumental, mythically inspired music dramas which some commentators consider as nourishment for Hitler's Master Race theories (this latter notion is more or less supported by the direction which German music took in the twentieth century, a route touched upon earlier by Russell in his film on Richard Strauss.) Apart from its basis in Wagneriana, the climactic sequence of the film also embellishes its sources and taps the general audience's more accessible areas of consciousness by drawing from a variety of cinefantastique and mythic wellsprings: the horror classics of both Universal and Hammer, the Flash (and Flesh) Gordon films, Superman comics, and even (in the stagey set-design) *The Wizard of Oz*.

The finale opens with an amusing reminiscence of Jonathan Harker's finding his way to the Transylvania citadel of Count Dracula, as Liszt asks terrified Jews for directions to Wagner's castle in an episode recreated in the most authentic Hammer Films style. Actually, however, the British studio has already been invoked by Russell in his conception of Wagner as Vampire, pointedly established in the queasily realistic scene (in the Weimar sequence) in which the German composer slurps Liszt's blood as the latter is playing the piano; although this was meant to demonstrate Wagner's theft of Liszt's musical ideas, here Russell out-Hammers Hammer in his horrific blood-and-gore effects.

(The Wagner/Vampire analogy is a funny cross-reference which seems rather sophomoric at first glance, but which a bit of delving again into music history proves to be perfectly in order. Wagner did indeed "borrow" and adapt many of Liszt's musical innovations—such as the leit motif, developed by Liszt in his sophisticated orchestral tone poems—as well as assimilating elements of the Hungarian's forward-looking harmonic, melodic and distinctive orchestral style into his own writing. Though Russell presents the concept as one of the blunt theft of a single melody, the continuing Vampire motif accurately evokes the gradual usurping of one composer's musical style by another, certainly not a process conducive to straightforward visualization. The symbolism also accurately sums up the eventual result of Liszt's "draining" relationship with Wagner, that Liszt's reputation as one of the most inventive of the Romantic composers was eclipsed in his own time by Wagner's fame and self-exploitation, and only recently has begun to be salvaged.)

Once on the balcony of Wagner's Gothic/Nazi castle, Liszt peers into his foe's laboratory and witnesses a strange ritual based, both conceptually and musically, on the opening scene of Wagner's first "Ring" opera, "The Rhinegold." In Russell's interpretation, the dwarf Alberich is metamorphosed into a sinister giant with a glittering Star of David on his forehead, who not only steals the gold (in Wagner's mythology a symbol of absolute world power and domination) but also deflowers the virginal Rhinemaidens, a bevy of nude, golden-haired lovelies whose rape at the hand of "the Beast" illustrates the intense fear excited in the German soul by the spectre of their blood-purity's being tainted, and provides a graphic lesson for an audience of horrified young children, "the flower of German youth."

Wagner's companion in this ritualistic orgy-spectacular is Cosima, Liszt's daughter, earlier rejected by her parents and now wearing her half of a bright red and blue "His'n'-hers" Superman outfit. Once again, Russell fantasizes savagely with the aid of historical fact. While most symbolic of the Nazis' youth "conditioning," the indoctrination of the young children by a parody of the "Ring" spectacle also suggests the ostentatious, self-consciously "sacred" ambience in which Wagner presented his own music-dramas at his own festival theater in Beyreuth. Though, as the film documents, the two composers were estranged after Cosima left her first husband, the conductor Hans von Bulow, to live with and eventually marry Wagner, and though she did in fact share in the maintenance of Bayreuth until her death, long after Wagner's own, there was never quite as cataclysmic a clash between the two composers as Russell envisions. Here the director seems to be indulging in a kind of cinematic psychodrama, correcting the balance of history, as it were.

After Cosima ushers out the goose-stepping, "Heil!"-ing children, Wagner doffs his "Superman" drag and slips into something more comfortable (if uncomfortably bourgeois and at odds with his self-proclaimed "Super Hero" image,) a matching leopard-skin smoking jacket and tam, another esoteric visual pun which suggests the disillusionment Nietzsche felt towards the older, less-revolutionary and more self-promoting composer whom the philosopher ultimately berated and dismissed as a hypocrite and a decadent.* (Nietzsche had founded *his* Germanic Superman philosophy, espoused in *Also Sprach Zarathustra,* on Wagner's "Ring" hero, Siegfried. *Also Sprach Zarathustra* was later given musical immortality by Richard Strauss in his 1896 tone poem of the same name, the opening fragment of which became the "theme" from Kubrick's *2001.*)

Having been invited in by Wagner, who desires an audience for his "triumph" in true Colin Clive fashion, Liszt remains to jeer and finally to do combat with his adversary. On realizing that the holy water with which he mixes Wagner's Bloody Mary has failed in its exorcismic effect, Liszt turns on Wagner with his enemy's own piano (thereby reaffirming Liszt's faith in his music as opposed to any religion), gunning down the power-mad egocentric in an authentically Apocalyptic series of fiery blasts from the grand-piano-turned-machine-gun.

Hommages to the cinema's heritage of horror continue as Wagner rises from the dead, summoned by an eerie chant (and another musical in-joke), "Weia! Wagala! Weia!", the very first words sung by Wagner's Rhinemaidens in "Rhinegold," repeatedly intoned by an audience of the devout. Now awesomely transfigured into a combination Hitler/Frankenstein's Monster, Wagner staggers into town to annihilate the Jews as they frantically try to retrieve the golden balls from their pawnshops before taking flight. As the monster goes its hulking way (trailed by rosy-cheeked youngsters who hurl incendiary bombs at any prey it might have missed) Cosima herself inflicts final voodoo torments on an imprisoned Liszt.

Suddenly in Heaven, but looking Earthwards, Liszt views the havoc being wrought by Wagner's monster as it devastates Berlin, and decides to put an end to it. Manning a sleek spaceship, Liszt and his women set off for Earth (via brief but beautifully colored and designed special effects) to wield retribution with an ultimate Zap which leaves the rampaging automaton a pile of blasted bones. Their job finished, and now freed from the torments of the flesh, earthly desires and jealousies, the spaceship's crew return to their Heaven/Haven—"Peace at last!" as music, "the

best that remains," provides a purifying benediction to Russell's blazing cinematic "Gotterdamerung."

The main reservation which an admirer of *Lisztomania* might with good reason have is the question of just whom Russell's latest composer film was designed for. As a musician Liszt has certainly not yet become a cult figure, nor is he as widely popular as Tchaikowsky or even Mahler. Since Russell's fantasia on the latter could not even get a general release in the United States, one wonders why the director thought that a Liszt biography would fare any better. It can only be speculated that Russell was counting on his new film's riding the crest of *Tommy* to at least a modest commercial success (though in retrospect it seems that while Russell was probably the only director working today who could have made the Who's diffuse and dramatically unbalanced property function cinematically, it was still the rock group's popularity and the charisma built-in to *Tommy* itself which sold the film to mass audiences and made it Russell's first commercial success since *Women in Love,* rather than any particularly Russellian qualities). Ironically, in spite of its bid for commercial acceptance in terms of the appeal of Roger Daltrey (who is considerably better as Liszt than as Tommy), the Liszt film remains the most "For Russell Buffs Only" feature film its director has yet made. Caught in a limbo between devotees of classical music (including, supposedly, the critics who hate it just as they hated *Music Lovers* and *Mahler*) and the turned-on youth audience (or what's left of it) to whom it means little or nothing in one way or another, *Lisztomania* is left sadly dangling, a brilliant, unique, and intensely personal film in search of an audience which perhaps doesn't even exist.

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Would you like to know how Mast arrives at the thought that the "appeal of the cinema is the *cumulative* kinetic hypnosis of the *uninterrupted* flow of film and time"? Even if, perversely, you would, you won't want to carry it away with you. What could you do with it? Mast's ideas are mostly dead ends, primer-level assertions dressed up in vaguely imposing-sounding words and phrases. His close analyses of specific shots and scenes in films like *Citizen Kane* and *Playtime* are sometimes competent, but even they are subject to the "hmm" factor—that being the reader response to an observation somewhere in between a genuine insight and blatant nonsense. And isn't it about time to retire the shower sequence in *Psycho* as a source of textbookish illustrations of anything and everything?

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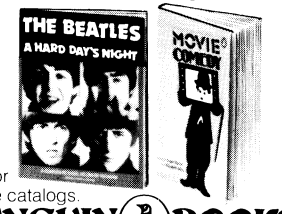

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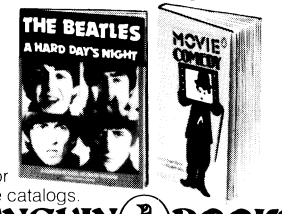

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more than 30 women directors in the American silent film industry, almost all of whom are absolutely unknown. These early women directors constitute a blind spot in the history of film production (no other books on the subject exist) and *Early Women Directors* makes a step toward filling that gap. Unfortunately, the subtitle *Their Role in the Development of Silent Cinema,* promises more than it delivers. Slide is to be congratulated for the amount of historical data he has gathered, but he has failed to place his information in any context. Critical or evaluative commentary is absent; chatty descriptions of the careers of these women, superficial discussions of their films, anecdotes, and personal reminiscences make up the material; close to half of this 120-page book is photographs (albeit rare stills). Slide does cite contemporary reviews wherever possible to note the critical reception of the films, and that's to his credit. Yet the conclusion states simply that women lost their position of virtual control over the industry, without attempting to assess the causes for this.

But the biggest problem is Slide's masculine prejudice with which he opens his book and thereby situates the important factual data he's collected. Deploring the fact that "few women writers seemed willing to undertake the research necessary to uncover the facts concerning women directors before the coming of sound," he comes to his ironic (?) conclusion: "It would almost seem that women's rightful place was in the home, cooking, and bringing up children, rather than researching film history in the Museum of Modern Art, the Library of Congress or the New York Public Library." The reader is confronted with phrases like "raised from the typical female occupation of secretary to the masculine one of film directing."

Nonetheless, this slim volume provides much useful source information (periodicals from the twenties and earlier, a 68-item bibliography) for anyone interested in undertaking a serious examination of the careers of these women directors.

—SANDY FLITTERMAN

Swain, Dwight V. *Film Scriptwriting: A Practical Manual.* (New York: Hastings House, 1977. $14.50.) Carries on the script-carpentry tradition of Eugene Vale, *et al.* This kind of homey wisdom should not be despised, lest it crop up as "insights into narratology" or otherwise fashionable novelties. But Swain has a dismally cheap style which makes it almost intolerable to read him. "You impel [the character] forward on twin wheels of *confrontation* and *transition.* A confrontation is a unit of conflict; a time-unified meeting of opposing forces." And so on. If you can handle this kind of pap writing, you can learn something about story structure, the mechanics of script typing style, etc., and survival in the film industry. —E.C.

Walker, Alexander. *Rudolph Valentino.* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977. $2.95.) A rather weird combination of gossip, speculation about Valentino's sexuality, and many a comic turn of movie (and legal) history. Completed before the Russell film. —E.C.

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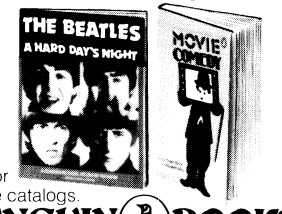

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